

Medieval Blood Myths: Christian Readings and Misreadings of Jewish Practice towards Blood

by

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MEDIEVAL BLOOD MYTHS: CHRISTIAN READINGS AND MISREADINGS OF JEWISH PRACTICE TOWARDS BLOOD

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In the High and Late Middle Ages, Christians accused Jews of shedding Christian blood, and sometimes even their own, for ritual purposes. This project is interested in how Jewish and Christian perceptions of blood may have led to the formation of such myths. I begin my analysis by discussing the ways in which medieval Jews and Christians interacted with one another, thereby providing the opportunity for Christians to observe and interpret the behaviors of their Jewish neighbors. Furthermore, Judaism and Christianity's shared history and typological language would have facilitated an awareness of one another's traditions. This paper, therefore, aims to demonstrate how interactions and common roots would have helped to shape Christian readings of Jewish practice. I argue that in observing and interpreting Jewish behavior towards blood, Christians applied their own concerns and values to make Jews active vehicles for Christian exegesis. Blood accusations stemmed from an awareness, observation, and interpretation of Jewish practices as filtered through the lenses of the medieval Christian *Weltanschauung*. In some cases, Christians even misinterpreted Jewish practices. To argue my thesis, I pair one type of bloodshed familiar to medieval Christians with one type of blood accusation made against Jews. The pairs are: the Crusades and ritual murder, menstruation and male menstruation, circumcision and ritual cannibalism, and the paschal lamb sacrifice and Host desecration. Each pair will be a case study in how Christians may have understood, or perhaps

misunderstood, Jewish practice from a Christian perspective and how such a phenomenon contributed to the formation of blood accusations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| PREFACE..... | IX |
| 1.0 INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| 2.0 MEDIEVAL JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN INTERACTION | 9 |
| 3.0 THE CRUSADES AND RITUAL MURDER: “<i>NEC AD PATRIOS FINES QUANDOQUE REGREDI</i>” | 17 |
| 3.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND | 18 |
| 3.2 A RETURN HOME IN LIGHT OF THE CRUSADES..... | 19 |
| 3.2.1 An Additional Explanation for Why Jews Shed Blood to Return Home in 1144, and Its Limitations..... | 24 |
| 4.0 MENSTRUATION AND MALE MENSTRUATION: “<i>SANGUIS EIUS SUPER NOS ET SUPER FILIOS NOSTROS</i>” | 28 |
| 4.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND | 29 |
| 4.2 THE DISCOURSE OF PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL IMPURITY | 34 |
| 4.3 A RETURN TO MALE MENSTRUATION: A MISAPPLIED FRAMEWORK FOR IMPURITIES AND THE PROXIMITY THAT MADE IT POSSIBLE..... | 39 |
| 5.0 CIRCUMCISION AND RITUAL CANNIBALISM: COVENANTS IN BLOOD AND RITUALS IN WINE AFTER THE FOURTH LATERAN COUNCIL | 41 |

| | | |
|-------|---|----|
| 5.1 | HISTORICAL BACKGROUND | 42 |
| 5.1.1 | The Christian Response to 1215 | 44 |
| 5.2 | REDEMPTIVE BLOOD COVENANTS AND THEIR COMMEMORATIONS WITH WINE | 45 |
| 5.2.1 | Jewish and Christian Covenants | 45 |
| 5.2.2 | Commemorations of Blood Covenants with Rituals of Wine | 47 |
| 5.3 | CONCLUSION | 49 |
| 6.0 | THE PASCHAL LAMB SACRIFICE AND HOST DESECRATION: TREATMENTS OF THE COMMUNION WAFER AND THE <i>AFIKOMEN</i> | 53 |
| 6.1 | HISTORICAL BACKGROUND | 54 |
| 6.2 | SYMBOLS OF THE PASCHAL LAMB SACRIFICE: THE <i>AFIKOMEN</i> AND THE HOST | 56 |
| 6.2.1 | Jewish Treatments of the <i>Afikomen</i> | 58 |
| 6.3 | CONCLUSION | 60 |
| 7.0 | EPILOGUE..... | 64 |
| | BIBLIOGRAPHY | 68 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 1: Map of Norwich, England | 12 |
| Figure 2: Passau broadsheet depicting Host desecration and miracle, c.1480..... | 56 |
| Figure 3: Mantua <i>Haggadah</i> , 1560 | 65 |
| Figure 4: Illustration of the ritual murder of Anderl von Rinn, from his cult-church, unknown date | 66 |

PREFACE

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have assisted me in my intellectual journey at the University of Pittsburgh, and who have helped make the production of this thesis a reality. It has been an honor to discuss my ideas with many dedicated professors. Foremost, I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Bruce Venarde, for his encouragement and enthusiasm as both an advisor and professor. I would also like to thank Dr. Jonathan Elukin, Dr. Hannah Johnson, Dr. Janelle Greenberg, and Dr. Adam Shear for their support of this project. I am also extremely grateful to the entire staff of the University Honors College, who have helped nourish my intellectual curiosity and who have enormous faith in the potential for undergraduate attainment. Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their unceasing support. Thank you!

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The woman woke up after a vision, and in the morning she reported to her father what she had seen during the night in sleep. Therefore, the father, having much experience in the interpretation of visions, wondering what it presaged and what this foretold, first thought it over and pondering each detail after a small amount of time responded to his daughter, “in any case, you must know, most beloved daughter, that you are pregnant, and rejoice with joy, because in very truth, you will bring forth a son who will both gain the greatest honors in the lands and will be exalted most in heaven, raised above the highest of the clouds.”¹

To whom is this passage referring? Could it be Sarah, matriarch of Judaism and wife of Abraham? At ninety, Sarah is barren and longing to conceive when God visits Abraham and says, “No, but your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.”² Or is it perhaps the Virgin Mary? An angel visits her and declares, “Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord

¹ Quo uiso mulier expegefacta est, et quod nocte per sompnum uiderat, mane patri retulit. Pater itaque plurimam expendendarum uisionum peritiam habens, quid hoc presagii foret uel quid portenderet admiratus, primo secum excogitauit, atque singula reuoluens post modicum filie respondit: Noueris utique, dilectissima filia, te impregnari, et gaudio gaude, quoniam reuera paritura es filium qui et in terris honorem maximum consequetur et super altitudinem nubium eleuatus in celum plurimum exaltabitur. Augustus Jessopp and Montague Rhodes James, ed. *The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich by Thomas of Monmouth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896), 11. My translation.

² Genesis 17:19. All biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

God will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign in the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”³

In fact, this passage refers to neither Sarah nor Mary but to a twelfth-century woman named Elviva, the mother of the martyr William of Norwich. In 1144, the Jews of Norwich, England were said to have crucified young William. As the mother of the first alleged victim of ritual murder, Elviva fits a typological model of Sarah and Mary; these three women discover unexpected pregnancies through divinely inspired means. They are then told that their son will be greatly exalted and leave a legacy ordained by God. Their sons’ comparison to lambs is but one way in which this typology may be extended.⁴ For instance, God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. When God reveals the binding to be a test, Abraham and Isaac sacrifice a ram⁵ in Isaac’s place.⁶ John the Evangelist⁷ and Mass text call Jesus the *agnus dei*, or lamb of God, *qui tollis peccata mundi*, “You who takes away the sins of the world.” This is a reference to Jesus’ sacrifice for substitutionary atonement and may be extrapolated to Jesus’ likeness to the *korban pesach*, or paschal lamb sacrifice (see section 6.2). William’s hagiographer, Thomas of Monmouth, also describes young William as an *agnus*⁸; he also draws several parallels between the passions of Jesus and William in his description of William’s torture, which includes elements such as a crown of thorns and crucifixion.⁹

³ Luke 1:30-33.

⁴ For the purposes of this paper, “typology” will denote tropes, concepts, and/or symbols shared by Jews and Christians, which each group interpreted for its own purposes.

⁵ A classification of lamb.

⁶ Genesis 22:1-13.

⁷ John 1:29.

⁸ Jessopp and James 18-19.

⁹ Ibid. 21.

While Thomas of Monmouth almost certainly intended to compare Elviva with Mary, and William with Jesus, he nonetheless alludes to Sarah and Isaac. Although Christianity believed Sarah and Isaac to be typological prefigurations of Mary and Jesus, Thomas still evokes Sarah in his text. Thomas's reference to a Jewish matriarch in this hagiography is a simple example of the conflation and confusion of Jewish and Christian typologies, discourses, and even rituals during the Middle Ages.

Jewish and Christian conceptions of blood and bloodshed present a more nuanced and complex discussion of shared typological models than the example presented by Thomas of Monmouth above. Specifically, the variations in shared discourses of blood paint an intricate portrait of Jewish and Christian understandings of one another. This paper is concerned with the similar yet nuanced blood discourses held in common by Jews and Christians, and how the subtle discursive differences between the two were a key source of the medieval accusation that Jews shed Christian blood (and sometimes their own blood) for ritual purposes. This accusation took a variety of forms: (1) ritual murder, that Jews murdered and/or crucified Christian children for religious reasons, often around the holidays of Passover and Easter; (2) male menstruation, that Jewish males menstruated in punishment for the crime of deicide¹⁰; (3) ritual cannibalism¹¹, that Jews ingested Christian blood for Passover rites and for other medical and nutritional reasons; and (4) Host desecration, that Jews abused the communion wafer that was transubstantiated into the real presence of Christ. Scholars such as Venetia Newall have gone so far as to claim that

¹⁰ According to traditional scriptural exegesis, Jews took on the collective guilt for Jesus' death when they exclaimed, "His blood be upon us and our children!" (Matthew 27:25).

¹¹ Gavin Langmuir labels accusations of blood ingestion as "blood libel." However, scholars too often use "blood libel" as a general term for any blood accusation. To avoid confusion, I will use "ritual cannibalism" when referring to blood consumption and "blood myth" or "blood accusation" as a general term.

any Christian interpretations of Jewish practice that brought about these accusations rested on woeful ignorance.¹² As we will find out, this assessment is woefully wrong.

Scholars from Jacob Katz¹³ to Ivan Marcus¹⁴ to Jonathan Elukin¹⁵ have demonstrated that Jews and Christians frequently interacted with one another during the High Middle Ages, questioning stereotypical assumptions that adherents of these two religions were isolated from one another. Many sources demonstrate Jewish and Christian interaction. For instance, medieval law codes indicate that Jewish and Christian social interactions were matters of concern, while polemics demonstrate the extent to which certain Jews and Christians were responding to one another over shared religious issues. Judaism and Christianity's shared yet divergent histories, typological language, and quotidian interactions would have prompted an awareness of one another's traditions, at least to a certain degree.¹⁶

It is the purpose of this paper to demonstrate how both interactions *and* common roots shaped Christian readings of Jewish practice. In observing and interpreting Jewish behavior, Christians applied their concerns and values to make Jews active vehicles for Christian exegesis. Rather than finding that a Christian reading of Jewish practice towards blood was a product of ignorance, I argue that blood accusations stemmed from an awareness, observation, and

¹² Venetia Newall, "The Jew as a Witch Figure." *The Witch Figure*, ed. Venetia Newall (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 105.

¹³ Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Studies in Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).

¹⁴ Marcus, Ivan G, "A Jewish-Christian Symbiosis: The Culture of Early Ashkenaz." *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* David Biale, ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 2002).

¹⁵ Jonathan Elukin, *Living Together, Living Apart: Rethinking Jewish-Christian Relations in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

¹⁶ For a discussion on the awareness of one another's religious discourse by means of cultural integration in the High Middle Ages, see Elukin 67. For a discussion on how this awareness contributed to religious disputation, see Israel Yuval, "Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages: Shared Myths, Common Language." *Demonizing the Other: Antisemitism, Racism, and Xenophobia*. Robert Wistrich, ed. (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999), 88.

interpretation of Jewish practices as filtered through the lens of the medieval Christian Weltanschauung. That Christians projected their concerns and values onto the Jews does not necessarily mean that Christians were misinterpreting Jewish practice. Yet even in cases where Christians *did* misunderstand Jewish traditions, such misinterpretation was still rooted in a Christian reading of Jewish practice. Within the scope of this paper, misprisions seem to arise from behaviors aberrant to Christians, such as having boiling water present in a house where torture is supposedly occurring (see chapter 2), orally sucking blood from the circumcision wound (see section 5.3), and nailing a wafer-like bread to a wall (see section 6.2.1). Regardless, a distinctly Christian reading of Jewish practice brought subtle differences between Jewish and Christian conceptions of blood to the forefront and helped create dangerous myths.¹⁷

In order to understand differences in the Jewish and Christian perceptions of blood and how they contributed to the creation of blood myths, I will examine certain types of religious bloodshed according to both Jewish and Christian belief. The types of bloodshed analyzed here are the Crusades, menstruation, circumcision, and the paschal lamb sacrifice. To argue my thesis, I pair one type of bloodshed with one blood myth. By reading these two ideas together, I illuminate points of divergence¹⁸ in the Jewish and Christian discourses of blood. My pairs are: the Crusades and ritual murder, menstruation and male menstruation, circumcision and ritual cannibalism, and the paschal lamb sacrifice and Host desecration. Each pair will be a case study

¹⁷ Although Jews and Christians shared a religious awareness, this paper is predominantly concerned with Christian interpretations of Jewish practice, rather than the opposite. It is important to note, however, that Jews did apply their own concern to Christian religious tradition. For instance, the medieval Jewish polemical biography of Jesus, *Toledot Yeshu*, claims that Jesus was conceived while Mary was menstruating. This Christian event was interpreted from a Jewish perspective that condemns sexual relations during menstruation.

¹⁸ By “point of divergence,” I mean where Jewish and Christian discourses differed and would provide an opportunity for Christians to make their own reading of Jewish practice.

in how Christians may have interpreted (or misinterpreted) Jewish practice and belief from a Christian perspective to contribute to the formation of a blood accusation.

I begin my examination in chapter 2 by discussing the ways in which business interactions between Jews and Christians facilitated other types of social interaction. This chapter provides a foundation for how medieval Christians would have had opportunities to observe and interpret the behavior of their Jewish neighbors. Chapter 3 analyzes the very first ritual murder accusation, which alleged that Jews required Christian bloodshed in order to return to the homeland from which they were exiled. I underline Christian concern for the Crusades as a motivating force behind the ritual murder charge. I then discuss how the Jewish self-martyrdoms during the First Crusade may have contributed to the 1144 ritual murder allegation. Chapter 4 treats menstruation and male menstruation, a traditional Christian punishment for betrayers of Jesus. In considering Jewish and Christian ideas of physical and spiritual purity, I demonstrate that Christians applied their framework of impurity to the Jews, whose ideas of impurity were only subtly different, and created an imaginative but not unprecedented punishment for those who supposedly committed deicide. Chapters 5 and 6 consider theories of contemporary scholars Gavin Langmuir and David Biale regarding Christian reaction to the recently dogmatized Eucharist, determining that transubstantiation was at the forefront of the contemporary Christian consciousness. In chapter 5, I study how Jews and Christians utilized wine in the commemorations of their respective blood-covenants. I then employ Langmuir and Biale to demonstrate the consequences a heightened Eucharistic concern in light of a similar blood-covenant discourse. Chapter 6 discusses the remarkable similarities of the Host and the *afikomen*, especially as both are symbolic of the paschal lamb sacrifice, and how such similarities may have brought about Host desecration accusations. Using the Eucharistic

arguments of Langmuir and Biale, I then critically analyze a theory put forth by Israel Yuval, in which a Jewish treatment of the *afikomen* may have been interpreted to be Host desecration. I finally suggest that Christians may have viewed this Jewish treatment of the *afikomen* with an increased concern for the real presence in the Host. To conclude, chapter 7 analyzes a blood myth created by Jews, demonstrating a case in which Jews responded to the blood accusations by reappropriating the images and tropes that Christians employed against them, reflecting contemporary Jewish concerns.

This paper will not attempt to definitively find the cause for every single blood accusation. Indeed, factors other than a concerned reading of Jewish practice towards blood could have also contributed to the formation and proliferation of blood accusations, but an analysis of such topics is beyond the scope of this paper. It is important to note, however, that earlier accusations could have built upon one another to bring about later or different types of allegations. Nor shall this paper try to determine the precise extent to which certain Christians were aware of certain Jewish practices. For the purposes of this analysis, I employ a lowest common denominator, discussing Jewish practices that almost all Christians would presumably be somewhat familiar with through Jewish interactions and observations, word of mouth, or a rough familiarity with the Old Testament. However, in the cases of elites, polemics may have also contributed to the Christian understanding of Judaism. An examination of how the literate elite and the illiterate masses may have understood Jewish practice would be a potential avenue for future research.

Before I begin my discussion, I must note my spatial and temporal limitations. The geographical locus of my study is Western Europe, particularly England, France, and Germany, where these blood accusations originated and gained popularity. The Jewish communities under

examination, therefore, are the Jews of *Ashkenaz*. My temporal focus encompasses the turn of the twelfth century, including the First Crusade of 1096 and the first blood accusation in 1144, to approximately the fifteenth century, as these accusations began to extend outwards from Western Europe.

2.0 MEDIEVAL JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN INTERACTION

The extent to which medieval Jews and Christians interacted is especially difficult to gauge, given the immense variation of Jewish populations in certain geographic localities across time. However, it is unnecessary for present purposes to demonstrate that Jews and Christians were highly integrated, or that there was a noticeable increase in integration across time; this paper must only show that, in general, Jews and Christians had enough interactions to facilitate an awareness of one another's religious practices. Since substantial interaction arose from business dealings between Jews and Christians,¹⁹ this section will therefore discuss social interactions within an economic context. In conjunction with the following chapters, this section aims to provide a context for the ways in which interaction allowed Christians to observe and read Jewish practice from their own perspective.

Medieval Jews and Christians were, in fact, discouraged from interacting with one another. It is perhaps from such dissuasions that the stereotypical picture of isolation and mutual avoidance arose. As secular rulers permitted Jews entry into their lands, the Church felt duty-bound to prevent social interaction between Jews and Christians. For instance, ninth-century bishops Agobard and Amulo of Lyon wrote several letters warning adherents to keep their distance from Jews.²⁰ Additionally, Canon 68 of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 decreed

¹⁹ Katz 38.

²⁰ Ibid. 8.

that Jews be distinguished in dress from their Christian neighbors, lest Christians have relations with Jews of the opposite sex.²¹ While most Christian exhortations regarding Jews were merely suggestions, Jewish prohibitions on contact with Christians were technically legally binding.²² The Talmud also attempted to regulate the segregation of Jews and Christians by its outmoded prohibitions on Jewish contact with idolaters; indeed Christians were regarded as idolaters.²³ Because the Babylonian Talmud was written when Jews subsisted in isolated groups, medieval *halakhists* tailored these antiquated dictums to fit the contemporary situation—one in which necessity required that Jews and Christians function in one economic group.²⁴ The disjunction between the theory and practice of Talmudic interdictions was most noted by the *tosaphists* of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, who attempted to make established laws and the contemporaneous status quo congruent.²⁵ One of the ways in which this was achieved was by exempting Christians from the category of “idolaters.”²⁶

Nonetheless, contact between Jews and Christians became inevitable due to economic necessity; Jews often depended on Christians for their livelihoods.²⁷ For instance, an unknown tenth-century *halakhic* authority declared that Jews could not engage in business dealings with Christians on their festival days; however, according to the tenth century *halakhist* Rabbenu

²¹ Ibid. 8-9, H.J. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text Translation, and Commentary* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co, 1937), 290.

²² Katz 25.

²³ Ibid. 24-25.

²⁴ Ibid. 25, 29, 30, 32, 123.

²⁵ Ibid. 29.

²⁶ Ibid. 25.

²⁷ Ibid. 31, 33

Gershom²⁸, Christians had so many holidays that abstaining from business would be detrimental to Jewish livelihoods.²⁹

The necessity of economic interaction reveals the formulaic isolated Jewish quarter to be a misconception. For instance, the physical organization of medieval Norwich shows that isolation is a myth. Immediately before the 1144 accusation, less than a century after the Norman Invasion of 1066, the town of Norwich was divided between the English and the Normans.³⁰ Augustus Jessopp and Montague Rhodes James's description of the place of the Jews in the town and their connection to the English institutions is worth quoting:

It was, of course, with the former (the English, as opposed to the Normans) that the Jews were entirely bound up, at least so far as they lived in the Jewry, —as no doubt all did, with very few exceptions. A description of the locality will shew that they were as closely as possible connected with the Castle.... The Jews belonged to the king and were under the special protection of his local representative. Where would they be better placed than immediately outside the Castle enclosure and at the very spot where access between the Castle and the Market was established?³¹

A map of twelfth-century Norwich shows that the Jewish quarter was located in the heart of the town among its economic and governing institutions, rather than in some remote corner.³²

²⁸ Born in present-day Metz, France; died in present-day Mainz, Germany.

²⁹ Katz 33.

³⁰ Jessopp and James xlvii-xlviii; For a discussion on how the 1144 accusation may have brought English and Norman together, see Jeffrey J. Cohen, "The Flow of Blood in Medieval Norwich." *Speculum* 79 (2004): 26-65.

³¹ Jessopp and James xlvii.

³² Ibid. xlviii. I have underlined the Jewry in red.

MAP OF NORWICH
TO ILLUSTRATE
THE STORY OF ST WILLIAM.

This permitted the Jews of Norwich to engage in business with their Christian neighbors, and would have provided opportunities for each to observe the practices of the other.

An instance of Jewish and Christian interaction facilitating religious observation in Norwich must be noted. Christians were often servants in Jewish households³³ and Norwich was no exception. According to Thomas of Monmouth's *The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich*, there was a Christian servant in the Jewish house in which young William was killed. She claimed that she was ordered to bring boiling water to her masters as an aid in William's murder.³⁴ However, William's death happened around Passover, a time when Jews boil their dishes and utensils to eradicate any trace of bread crumbs, making these items fit to be used during the holiday. Therefore, the presence of boiling water in the Jewish household could have been mistaken for something quite sinister. This testimony goes beyond a Christian reading to become a misinterpretation of Jewish practice, and may have helped to bring about the first blood accusation.

Jews and Christians lived and made business connections together in cities, towns, and even rural areas, especially during the centuries in which blood accusations arose. Jacob Katz remarks, "The picture of a Jew waiting at home for the Gentile to borrow money or to pay a debt is a realistic one, at least for the period commencing with the Crusades."³⁵ This picture probably would have applied in a typical European village, town, or city. During the eleventh century, many German bishops and kings issued charters attracting Jews to their cities, perhaps hoping to augment the local economy. For example, in 1084, Bishop Rudiger invited Jews to Speyer in

³³ Katz 38.

³⁴ Jessopp and James 89-90.

³⁵ Katz 38.

order to turn the village into a city.³⁶ A given town was often home to very few Jews, signaling a level of comfort, stability, integration, and business dealings with their Christian neighbors.³⁷ Even in towns that had Jewish quarters, the general population was so small that Jews and Christians had no choice but to interact with one another,³⁸ often out of economic necessity. In rural areas, Jews also served as clients and stewards for local Christians.³⁹ Contact between medieval Jews and Christians therefore occurred in all types of environments, and was often necessitated by the Christian need for Jewish trades, and vice versa.

It is important to note that economic interactions between Jews and Christians were not limited to banking and money lending. Sometimes, Jews aided local monasteries in obtaining land from indebted landowners.⁴⁰ Although this task was an extension of the banking trade, it may have provided an opportunity for one party to observe the other's religious practices. Documentation also exists to support Jewish involvement in the slave trade.⁴¹ Jews and Christians often traded with one another; one commercial yet controversial item was wine. The twelfth-century Rabbenu Tam and Rabbi Isaac attempted to reconcile the Talmudic prohibition on buying wine prepared by a Gentile with the contemporary situation. Eventually, Rabbenu Tam decided this wine could be a commodity traded between Jews and Christians, but was not suitable for drinking.⁴² Even the Church realized that Jews and Christians were doing business. In a letter to Aribert, Archbishop of Narbonne, the eighth-century Pope Stephen III wrote,

³⁶ Elukin 60.

³⁷ Katz 37, Elukin 84-85.

³⁸ Elukin 130.

³⁹ Ibid. 38.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 85.

⁴¹ Ibid. 46.

⁴² Katz 47.

“There are dangers in trading with him (the Jew).”⁴³ Perhaps already in the eighth century, commercial interactions between Jews and Christians were significant enough to constitute a threat.

Although both Christian and Jewish exhortations and decrees attempted to avoid any social and religious contact between the two parties, often for the fear that one party would lose adherents to the other party’s faith, business relationships inevitably encouraged social and maybe even religious interactions.⁴⁴ For example, the twelfth-century Herman-Judah of Deutz went to live with the Bishop of Münster to monitor the bishop’s loan.⁴⁵ Surrounded by Christians, he decided to convert to Christianity and his struggles are documented in his autobiography. Furthermore, his wedding brought his Jewish and Christian friends together: “When the day of the marriage feast was at hand, many gathered there, not only Jews but also my Christian friends.”⁴⁶ This is by no means the only instance of Jews and Christians celebrating together. In 1286, an English bishop attempted to prohibit Christian attendance at a Jewish wedding. His vexation grew upon hearing that his flock ignored his wishes and “had eaten, drunk, played, and jested with the Jews.”⁴⁷ If Jews and Christians were able to overcome distinctly different traditions by attending one another’s weddings, it is possible that, even in rare cases, Jews and Christians may have shared in other communal festivities and rituals such as the Passover *seder* or the baptism. If not, then this proximity borne of commercial and,

⁴³ ...sunt, ei periculose mercati sunt. Amnon Linder, ed. *The Jews in the Legal Sources of the Early Middle Ages*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 444. Also in Elukin 46. My translation.

⁴⁴ Katz 38.

⁴⁵ Elukin 72, 84.

⁴⁶ Karl F. Morrison, *Conversion and Text: The Cases of Augustine of Hippo, Herman-Judah, and Constantine Tsatsos* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1992), 96 in Elukin 84.

⁴⁷ Robin R. Mundill, *England’s Jewish Solution: Experiment and Expulsion, 1262-1290* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), 263 in Elukin 85, 157 n35.

subsequently, social interactions probably facilitated a knowledge of the goings-on at one another's rituals.

Not only did Jews and Christians attend one another's weddings, they may have married one another.⁴⁸ A plethora of medieval law codes, both secular and canon, mention intermarriage and sexual relations through prohibition and punishment, indicating they were matters of concern.⁴⁹ Whether these laws reference marriage, sexual relations, or slavery is immaterial for our purposes, since they, at their foundations, demonstrate interactions between Jews and Christians. The *Epitome Aegidii Breviarrii* from eighth-century Gaul states, "That a Jew (male) may not be permitted to have a Christian (female), nor a Christian (male) a Jew (female)."⁵⁰ Burchard of Worms's eleventh-century *Decretum* asks, "And is there anyone who has committed adultery with a Jew (female), or, if a Jew (male) or a pagan, with any Christian (female)?"⁵¹ Finally, the Twelfth Lateran Council of 1215 ordered Jews to dress differently than Christians because, "Sometimes it happens where, through error, Christians may lie with women of the Jews or Saracens, and Jews or Saracens with women of the Christians."⁵² Such relationships would have provided ample opportunity for those of one religion to behold the practices of the other.

⁴⁸ Elukin 69.

⁴⁹ Linder's *The Jews in the Legal Sources of the Early Middle Ages* contains at least 30 primary sources concerning intermarriage and sexual relations between Jews and Christians.

⁵⁰ Ut Iudeum non liceat habere Christianam nec Christiano Iudeam. *Epitome Aegidii Breviarrii* 3:7 in Linder 237. My translation.

⁵¹ Et aliquis, qui, cum Iudaea, vel, si Iudaeus vel paganus, cum aliqua Christiana moechatus fuerit? Burchard of Worms, *Decretum* 1:94:29 in Linder 634. My translation.

⁵² Unde contigit interdum, quod per errorem christiani Iudaeorum seu Saracenorum, et Iudaei seu Saracini christianorum mulieribus commisceantur. My translation. Schroeder 584.

3.0 THE CRUSADES AND RITUAL MURDER: “*NEC AD PATRIOS FINES QUANDOQUE REGREDI*”⁵³

Prior to the first ritual murder allegation in 1144 Norwich, Jews were subject to only two blood accusations. Both occurred in antiquity, far removed in time and space from William of Norwich. This chapter will examine why an accusation might have arisen in 1144. Specifically, Jews were said to have shed William’s blood in order to return to their homeland, from which they were exiled on account of their complicity in the deicide. I suggest that this homeland might be an eschatological one. In examining the text of the very first ritual murder allegation, I argue that this accusation is a projection of contemporary Christian concerns—namely, concerns for the Holy Land and perhaps a political millennialism as a result of the Crusades, as well as the prevailing belief that Jews were expelled from Israel because they supposedly killed Jesus—onto similar Jewish apocalyptic beliefs. Engaging with Jewish chronicles of the First Crusade and scholar Israel Yuval, I then put forward an argument that could link the 1096 self-martyrdoms of apocalyptic Jewish communities to the 1144 accusation.

⁵³ “...nor could they ever return to their home land.” This is a reference to the Norwich claim that Jews must annually shed the blood of Christians to return to *eretz yisrael*. Jessopp and James 93. My translation.

3.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the second century BCE, the Greek scholar Posidonius recorded the first accusation of ritual cannibalism against Jews. He recounted that in 168 BCE, the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes IV rescued a captive Greek from the Temple in Jerusalem. This prisoner claimed that once every seven years, the Jewish community imprisoned a Greek, fattened him, and ate his body parts, swearing contempt for Greeks; he was this year's unlucky victim. This accusation circulated among a few writers and was eventually repeated by Apion around the beginning of the Common Era, with the revision that these sacrifices occurred annually.⁵⁴ At the turn of the fifth century CE, a second accusation appeared, this time against the Jews of Inmestar, Syria. Socrates Scholasticus wrote that a group of drunken Jews crucified a little boy—this time, not in contempt of Greeks but of Christians.⁵⁵

The accusation that Christians appropriated blood for ritual purposes was not without precedent. The *Octavius* of Marcus Minucius Felix, a Christian apology structured as a dialogue between a Christian and a pagan, was one of the first texts to address this charge. Here, the pagan speaker gives readers one vivid picture of Christian cannibalism: "...this infant is slain by the young pupil, who has been urged on as if to harmless blows on the surface of the meal, with dark and secret wounds. Thirstily—O horror! —They lick up its blood; eagerly they divide its

⁵⁴ For a brief history of the dissemination and evolution of this accusation, see Gavin Langmuir, "Thomas of Monmouth: Detector of Ritual Murder." *Speculum* 59 no. 4 (Oct. 1984): 822-823. For Apion's version and Josephus's refutation of the accusation, see Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion* II: 8. William Whiston, trans. *Project Gutenberg*. Accessed 26 June 2009. <<http://www.gutenberg.org>>.

⁵⁵ Paul Halsall, ed. and trans. "Socrates Scholasticus: The Blood Libel in Syria (late 4th century) From Ecclesiastical History, Bk. VI: Chap. 16." *Medieval Sourcebook*. Accessed 7 April 2009. <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/socschol-bloodlibel.htm>>.

limbs. By this victim they are pledged together...”⁵⁶ This charge, and other similar ones, were almost certainly Roman misinterpretations of the Eucharistic service: “Take and eat...this is my blood which shall be shed for you; when you do this, do it in memory of me.”⁵⁷ Marcus Minucius Felix wrote a century or two after Apion, a few centuries before the Inmestar incident,⁵⁸ and nearly a millennium before William of Norwich.

Between Inmestar and Norwich, a span of approximately eight centuries, no blood accusations arose against the Jews. Why, then, did the accusation that Jews required blood resurface in 1144? To answer this question, we must first look at the accusation itself.

3.2 A RETURN HOME IN LIGHT OF THE CRUSADES

Thomas of Monmouth, William’s hagiographer, finds a most convincing witness to explain why Jews shed Christian blood in 1144 in an apostate named Theobald:

Indeed, he reported that it is thought to be set down in the ancient writings of their fathers that without shedding human blood, the Jews could neither gain freedom *nor ever return to their homeland*. Whence it was decided by them in ancient times that every year they would sacrifice under favorable auspices a Christian to the most high God of the whole world as a reproach and insult to Christ, so that *they might avenge their suffering on that*

⁵⁶ Marcus Minucius Felix, *Octavius* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 9. See also *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1887), 178 in Paul Halsall, ed. “The Ritual Cannibalism Charge Against Christians” *Ancient History Sourcebook*. Accessed 29 July 2009. <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/christian-cannibals.html>>.

⁵⁷ Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* in H. Achelis, *Die Canones Hippolyti* (Leipzig, 1881), 48-55 in Paul Halsall, ed. “The Ritual Cannibalism Charge Against Christians.”

⁵⁸ Scholars hypothesize that Marcus Minucius Felix was active anytime between 150 and 270 AD, which makes calculation of dates approximate at best.

*Christ, on account of whose very death they were both shut out from their homeland and as it were, lived as slaves in a foreign land.*⁵⁹

First of all, Theobald the apostate may or may not be a real person. Therefore, the claim that the Jews slaughtered a Christian child to return to the Jewish homeland came from either Theobald, Thomas of Monmouth himself, or someone else entirely. Yet the existence or non-existence of such a person poses no threat to this analysis; Thomas or his source would have had an opportunity to observe his Jewish neighbors, and would have been aware of contemporary events in Christendom such as the Crusades. By putting such words in the mouth of an apostate, Thomas makes the claim more legitimate to his readers. I will continue to use Theobald as the Christian voice of this accusation. In other terms, Theobald represents the Christian perception of Jewish practice.

We thus learn from Theobald that the Jewish end in slaughtering a Christian child is a return to the Jewish homeland, or *patria*. He clearly states that medieval Jews wished to “avenge their suffering” because they were “shut out from... their homeland.” Here, Theobald affirms the traditional medieval Christian belief that Jews were exiled from their homeland as divine punishment for the crime of deicide.⁶⁰ Because Jewish sufferings were based in their exile from their homeland, to appropriately avenge these sufferings Jews would need to return home by way of harming he who had them exiled in the first place: that is, harm Jesus. Though there was no

⁵⁹ Emphasis mine. Referebat quidem in antiquis patrum suorum scriptis scriptum haberi, iudeos sine sanguinis humani effusione nec libertatem adipisci nec ad patrios fines quandoque regredi. Vnde ab ipsis antiquitus decretum est omni anno eos in opprobrium et contumeliam Christi christianum ubicunque terrarum deo litare altissimo, ut sic suas in illum ulciscantur iniurias cuius mortis causa ipsi et a sua exclusi sunt patria et tanquam serui exulant in aliena. My translation. Jessopp and James 93-94.

⁶⁰ The destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE and the later expulsion of Jews from Judaea after the Bar Kokhba revolt confirmed Jewish compliance in Jesus’ crucifixion.

blood of Christ to shed in 1144, Theobald notes that the blood of a symbolic replacement for Christ, William, was sufficient.

I argue that the Crusades played a major role in shaping the Christian perception that Jews desired to return home. First of all, the ongoing Crusades would have elevated the Holy Land in the consciousness of both Christians and Jews. Christians may have imagined that their struggle to control the Holy Land—the Jewish homeland—would have made medieval Jews green with envy. Therefore, an increased Christian awareness of *eretz yisrael* in conjunction with the knowledge that Jews had been expelled from this very land on account of the deicide surely would have led the crusading Christians to believe that Jews desired a return to their homeland in 1144.

However, there was a problem: there was no Jewish *patria* to return to in 1144. As the Jews were exiled from Judaea in the second century, they had held no territorial homeland for nearly a thousand years by the time of this accusation. It is a possibility, then, that Theobald's confession might point to a return to an apocalyptic notion of the Jewish homeland. However, this is very difficult to prove and therefore less plausible than the idea of a heightened Christian consciousness of the Holy Land. Nonetheless, the killing of Christian children would not automatically transport the Jews to the land of Israel; a supernatural force would likely be needed. Where better to find a divinely conducted return to Israel than in eschatology? The ingathering of exiles in the land of Israel, or *eretz yisrael*, is a crucial part of the Jewish eschatological process. The Book of Isaiah says, "He will raise a signal for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the

earth.”⁶¹ Since Christian apocalyptic belief is partially based in the Old Testament, Christians would have known that they shared with the Jews a hope of an eschatological return to the Holy Land. The return to Israel is also mentioned in an exclusively Christian text, the Book of Revelations, which claims that God will live with his people in a rebuilt Jerusalem: “And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘see the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them.’”⁶² However, in Christianity, the idea of a return home is absent, as Christians have no homeland. Theobald, then, may have recognized not just a hope, but also perhaps a messianic hope to return home.

The Crusades may have also heightened contemporary Christian awareness of the apocalypse, contributing to a preexisting undercurrent of millennialism. Christians believed that the world would end in the year 1000, according to the prophecy set forth in Revelations 20:1-6. When the world did not end at the turn of the millennium, an active millennial movement continued well into the eleventh century, as numerous natural disasters threatened to foretell the impending doomsday.⁶³ Beginning with the Crusades, millennialism took on another, “extremely popular” form: political millennialism.⁶⁴ The political millennialism discussed here is

⁶¹ Isaiah 11:12.

⁶² Revelations 21:2-3.

⁶³ Shmuel Shepkaru, *Jewish Martyrs in the Pagan and Christian Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 156-157.

⁶⁴ Robert E. Lerner, “Millennialism.” *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*. Joseph R. Strayer, ed. vol. 8 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1987): 385-386.

exclusively Christian, for the Crusades brought the idea of a divinely ordained “conquering hero, who would unite the world for Christianity and become the greatest ruler of all time.”⁶⁵

Thus, during the Crusades, Christians would have viewed their Jewish neighbors, who were exiled from their homeland for their complicity in the deicide, through the lens of a concern for the Holy Land and, perhaps, eschatology. As Jews also expected a messianic return to Israel in their eschatological beliefs, one may see how Christians would have projected their concerns for the Holy Land and the apocalypse onto the Jews, to claim that Jews wanted to return to (a messianic) *eretz yisrael* by reenacting the bloodshed of the deicide that exiled them.

If Theobald were referring to an apocalyptic return home, then Christians applied their own ideas about the apocalypse onto the similar yet slightly different messianic discourse they shared with the Jews, specifically in reference to the bloodshed of the Crusades. The bloody conflicts between Christians and Muslims heightened Jewish and Christian awareness of the Holy Land, a place where both Jews and Christians believed they would return with the coming apocalypse. However, an apocalyptic Holy Land would have signified differently for Jews and Christians: as the former’s apocalyptic belief espoused an ingathering of exiles in the homeland, the latter’s talked of a restoration to the Holy Land. This section argues that Christians read their own apocalyptic concern onto the Jews as a result of the widespread political climate of millennialism. If Jews did desire a messianic return home, then the next section offers an argument that certain contemporary Jewish communities *were* messianic.

⁶⁵ Lerner 386.

3.2.1 An Additional Explanation for Why Jews Shed Blood to Return Home in 1144, and Its Limitations

It is possible that the Crusades may have affected the 1144 accusation that Jews necessarily shed blood to return to an apocalyptic homeland in other ways. Whoever made the 1144 accusation may have had in mind a recent instance of Jews attempting to expedite the apocalypse, and therefore their return home, by means of bloodshed.

In 1095, Crusaders set off towards the Holy Land to emancipate Jerusalem from Muslim rule. However, what occurred en route to the First Crusade is of far greater concern to this analysis than what happened during the crusade. While passing through Jewish communities on the Rhine River in 1096, Crusaders instigated pogroms, attempting to kill or convert those in their wake. The Jewish reaction was immortalized in a set of chronicles: the *Chronicles of Solomon bar Simson*, *Rabbi Eliezer bar Nathan*, and the *Narrative of Old Persecutions*, or *Mainz Anonymous*⁶⁶ relate that many Jews chose an alternative. They engaged in self-martyrdom and ritually slaughtered themselves and their children. The means of death chosen by the Jewish communities is ritual in nature, as they closely resemble the practices of both Temple sacrifices and slaughtering kosher animals. For example, the *Solomon bar Simson* chronicle states that the swords used for slaughter were without defect;⁶⁷ likewise, a knife used for kosher slaughter must have no imperfections. Self-martyrs also recited the benediction for ritual slaughter and sprinkled blood on the Ark in a manner reminiscent of Temple sacrifices.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Shlomo Eidelberg, ed. and trans. *The Jews and the Crusaders: The Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusades* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977).

⁶⁷ “The Chronicle of Solomon bar Simson” in *ibid.* 31.

⁶⁸ “The Chronicle of Solomon bar Simson” in *ibid.* 40.

It is possible that these Jewish communities were apocalyptic in nature. The Chronicle of Solomon bar Simson begins: "...in the eleventh year of the cycle *Ranu*, *the year in which we anticipated salvation and solace*, in accordance with the prophecy of Jeremiah."⁶⁹ The prophecy to which the chronicler refers is: "Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, 'Save, O Lord, your people, the remnant of Israel.' See I am going to bring them from the land of the north, *and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth...they shall return here.*"⁷⁰ Shlomo Eidelberg suggests a messianic interpretation of the Chronicle's first line. The eleventh year of the cycle of *Ranu* corresponded to the Jewish year 4856, or 1096 CE. In the Jewish practice of *gematria*, a means of assigning symbolic numerical values to words and vice versa, the word *Ranu*, or "sing" (as in Jeremiah's prophecy) is equivalent to 256. Jewish tradition uses nineteen-year cycles and 1096 fell during the 256th cycle of the 256-cycle *Ranu*.⁷¹ The use of *gematria*, along with a prophecy that clearly relates to the ingathering of exiles, reinforces the argument that the Jews depicted in the Hebrew Chronicles may have belonged to messianic communities. Furthermore, Jews viewed the Crusade as a metaphor for the war between Gog and Magog, an event that traditionally heralds the coming of the messiah.⁷² By engaging in self-sacrifice, these Jewish communities desired to bring about the End of Days, to "expedite the will of their Creator," as Solomon bar Simson notes.⁷³ Of course, integral to the apocalypse was a return to *eretz yisrael*, the Jewish *patria*.

Therefore, if Theobald were aware that the Rhenish Jews of 1096 engaged in bloodshed for an eschatological end, he could have believed that Jews desired to do the same in 1144. The

⁶⁹ Emphasis mine. "The Chronicle of Solomon bar Simson," *ibid.* 21.

⁷⁰ Emphasis mine. Jeremiah 31:7-8.

⁷¹ Eidelberg 142 n4.

⁷² "The Chronicle of Solomon bar Simson," *ibid.* 13, 140 n17.

⁷³ "The Chronicle of Solomon bar Simson," *ibid.* 31.

Christian thinking is this: if Jews shed their own blood in order to expedite the apocalypse (and therefore return to *eretz yisrael*, a place they had been exiled from because they murdered Jesus), why not repeat the process, taking vengeance for this exile on symbolic Christs, such as William, by reenacting the crucifixion (which was responsible for expelling the Jews from Israel) through the ritual murder of innocent Christians? This is a variation of a controversial theory proposed by Israel Yuval in a 1993 article⁷⁴ and expanded upon in a 2006 book.⁷⁵ Yuval argues the Christian perspective of 1144, that if Jews sacrificed themselves and their children to bring divine vengeance to Gentiles by means of expediting the apocalypse, why not sacrifice Christians to achieve the same ends?

Yuval's theory has several problems, most of which are beyond the scope of this paper. However, I would like to bring up one critical problem: it is likely that Theobald did not know that these Jewish communities were apocalyptic in nature, if they were at all. Any evidence that these communities were messianic comes from the Jewish chronicles of the First Crusade. Shlomo Eidelberg presents a compelling case that these chronicles were probably not written down until the fourteenth century.⁷⁶ Therefore, Theobald and other twelfth-century Christians almost certainly did not read any of this evidence, which stated that Jews killed themselves in order to expedite the apocalypse and return home. It is, perhaps, more probable that English Christians such as Theobald would have heard of Jews engaging in self-sacrifice, but they probably would have perceived this as a Jewish refusal to be converted or killed by the

⁷⁴ Israel Yuval, "Vengeance and Damnation, Blood and Defamation: From Jewish Martyrdom to the Blood Libel Accusation." *Zion* 58 (1993): VI-VIII (English summary; article published in Hebrew).

⁷⁵ Israel Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

⁷⁶ Eidelberg 10.

Crusaders. Mary Minty has demonstrated through Christian chronicles and annals that German Christians were certainly aware of the events of 1096 soon after they occurred.⁷⁷ Perhaps, fifty years later, knowledge of such extraordinary events would have spread to England. If Theobald were somehow aware of the messianic tendencies of the 1096 Rhenish Jews, then a knowledge of Jewish self-sacrifice in anticipation of the apocalypse would certainly have helped contribute to the belief that Jews needed to shed blood to return home in 1144.

⁷⁷ Mary Minty, "Summary: *Kiddush Ha-Shem* in German Christian Eyes in the Middle Ages" *Zion* 59 (1994): XII-XIV.

4.0 MENSTRUATION AND MALE MENSTRUATION: “SANGUIS EIUS SUPER NOS ET SUPER FILIOS NOSTROS”⁷⁸

Although this paper primarily analyzes myths in which Jews shed Christian blood, the accusation that Jews shed their own blood is also worthy of examination. Between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries, there evolved the notion that Jewish males menstruated in punishment for killing Jesus.⁷⁹ To further investigate the myth of male menstruation, I shall discuss the evolution of this accusation as well as the medical and theological understandings of bloody purgation. I will then identify the subtle differences between Jewish and Christian understandings of menstruation to demonstrate that Christians applied their own framework for menstrual impurity to the Jews, creating an imaginative yet not wholly unexpected punishment for perpetrators of the deicide. This chapter engages with a wide variety of contemporary source texts, ranging from Thomas of Monmouth’s hagiography of William of Norwich to

⁷⁸ “His blood be upon us and our children!” exclaim the Jews, supposedly acknowledging their complicity in deicide. Matthew 27:25. Although this line has been interpreted in many ways throughout history (in one instance, it has been understood as an acceptance of Jesus’ New Covenant, as an echo of Exodus 24:8, where Moses sprinkles blood on the Israelites and they accept their covenant with God), my research has shown that this Jewish admission of guilt seemed to be the most popular interpretation throughout the Middle Ages. However, this seems to be a most fruitful avenue for further investigation.

⁷⁹ For the purposes of this paper, “evolution” traces the development from single instances of bloody purgation to a monthly menstruation. Willis Johnson, “The Myth of Jewish Male Menses.” *Journal of Medieval History* 24 no. 3: 282.

correspondence between Pope Gregory the Great and Augustine of Canterbury to the Talmud tractate *Niddah*.

4.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 1240, the Cistercian monk Caesarius of Heisterbach first suggested that Jewish males menstruated on a regular basis. However, bloody purgation as a punishment for betraying Christ was an ancient idea; it first appeared in the Acts of the Apostles, written circa 100 CE. After betraying Jesus to the Roman guards through a fateful kiss, Judas hangs himself in the field he bought with his blood money. Death does not exempt him from punishment for his treachery: “...he (Judas) burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. This became known to all residents of Jerusalem so that the field was called in their language Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.”⁸⁰ Late Antique scholars devoted much exegesis to this curious line. They generally agreed that Judas’s soul departed through his anus because it could not exit through his mouth, for his mouth had been purified when he kissed Jesus. This consensus continued to be discussed and was elaborated upon in the *Glossa Ordinaria* on Acts (circa 1120): “The bowels...which are the seat of deceit, bursting by such a wicked deed, were not able to restrain themselves. Rightfully, then, the bowels were poured out through the seat of deceit, not through the place of the kiss—that is, the mouth with which he kissed Jesus in false artifice—but through another, in

⁸⁰ Acts 1:18-19.

which the poison of secret malice entered.”⁸¹ Other betrayers of Jesus, including those who supposedly committed heresy and deicide, would suffer a similar fate.

The infamous heretic Arius was the next victim of bloody purgation. He betrayed Jesus, at least in the eyes of the Nicene Church, by propagation of heterodox ideas about the Trinity. The fourth-century monk and historian Rufinus describes his messy end: “...Arius, proceeding towards the church, surrounded by a crowd a bishops and people, turned aside to a public place because of human need. When he was sitting there, his intestines and all of his bowels flowed down the drain of the toilet. Thus in such a place, he paid a death worthy of a blasphemous and stinking mind.”⁸² In the following two centuries, both Arator and Gregory of Tours⁸³ explicitly connect Judas and Arius. Arator states that both died in punishment for wounding the Trinity through their mouths;⁸⁴ Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss, and Arius with his teachings.

New instances of betraying Jesus, and subsequent divine punishment, seemingly disappeared until 1144 Norwich.⁸⁵ It is important to note that even after the bloody flux punishment returned to Christian writing, many years passed between accusations. Male menstruation probably never achieved widespread belief, and even some of the authors listed

⁸¹ Viscera...que sunt sedes fraudis, tanto scelere dirupta se cohibere non valuerunt. Merito autem per sedem doli viscera funduntur, non per locum osculi, id est os quo osculatus est Iesum quamvis falso superficie, sed per alium cui virus occulte malicie inerat. *Biblia Sacrum cum Glossa Ordinaria et Expositionibus* vol. 6: 165v (Lyon, 1545) quoted in Johnson 279. My translation.

⁸² ...Arius ad ecclesiam pergens episcoporum et populorum frequentia constipatus, humanae necessitatis causa ad publicum locum declinat. Ubi cum sederet, intestina eius atque omni viscera in secessus cuniculum defluxere; ita tali in loco dignam mortem blasphemiae et foetidae mentis exsolvit. Rufinus, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* quoted in Johnson 277. My translation.

⁸³ Johnson 282.

⁸⁴ Schrader, R.J., J.L. Roberts, ed. and trans, and J.F. Makowski, trans. *Arator's On the Acts of the Apostles (De Actibus Apostolorum)* quoted in *ibid.* 278.

⁸⁵ Johnson 282 has a helpful chart detailing the dates, natures, sources, and proof texts of these accusations.

below (e.g. Thomas of Monmouth, Hugh of St. Cher, and Rudolph of Schlettstadt) only indicate that they learned of bloody purgation through hearsay. For instance, Thomas of Monmouth reports what he hears about Sheriff John, who protected the Jews of Norwich during the 1144 accusation. Although he betrayed Jesus through actions rather than words, he is still struck with a similar illness:

Likewise, we by no means wish to neglect death of the Sheriff John, which we believe was done in God's worthy vengeance. Accordingly, he, from the day of the synod, which, as we remember from the preceding book, he, fortified by many bribes, shielded the Jews from Christian justice, he began to suffer from an incurable disease. *For as was witnessed by some of his servants a little while later, from whom I also learned it after his death*, at that moment of time when, by protecting the Jews, and he began to openly oppose Christian law, as was aforementioned, his blood began to flow, drop-by-drop, out his posterior. And indeed divine vengeance was made clear concerning him, so that he is in fact able to say with the Jews: *innocent blood be upon us and upon our children*. Therefore, for two years, with the blood flowing with frequent succession out his bottom, the loss of blood diminished the strength of his body and brought pale color to his face. And although he sensed the wrath of God upon him was manifest, nevertheless he was completely hardened and did not yet want to repent.⁸⁶

Sheriff John eventually succumbs to bloody purgation. By protecting those who supposedly murdered Jesus and made martyrs out of innocent children, the sheriff is given a treatment similar to those of Judas and Arius. This is unsurprising, considering that as a Benedictine

⁸⁶ Mortem quoque Iohannis uicecomitis, quam condigna dei ultione gestam credamus, nequaquam pretermittere uolumus. Is siquidem a die synodali qua, ut precedenti meminimus libro, christiane iudeos iusticie multis premuneratus muneribus subtraxit, irremediabili cepit laborare morbo. Sicut etenim quibusdam familiarium suorum ipse postmodum testatus est, a quibus et id ipsum post mortem eius didici, puncto temporis quo iudeis patrocinando legi sicut predictum est christiane patenter aduersari cepit, per posteriora eius sanguis guttatim profulere inchoauit. Adeoque diuina circa eum claruit ultio, ut reuera cum iudeis dicere et ipse possit: *sanguis innocens super nos et super filios nostros*. Per duos igitur annos sanguine uicibus crebris per ima profluente uirtutem corporis sanguinis defectus imminuit, uultui pallorem induxit, et quamuis iram dei super se manifestam sentiret, totus tamen induratus necdum penitere uoluit. Jessopp and James 111. Also quoted in Johnson 279-280. My translation. My emphasis to indicate that Thomas himself did not witness this bloody purgation.

monk, Thomas of Monmouth was an educated man.⁸⁷ It is extremely likely that he had knowledge of and/or access to texts discussing Judas and Arius's punishments.

Once divine punishment by bloody flux returned to medieval literature, it continued to evolve until the seventeenth century. By 1240, Jewish males were said to menstruate annually in retribution for the ultimate betrayal of Christ—deicide. This first instance of annual bleeding appears in sermon written by the Cistercian monk Caesarius of Heisterbach:

In a city of England, there lived the daughter of a Jew, who, like many of her race, was a very beautiful girl. A young clerk, a relative of the bishop of that city and a canon of the cathedral saw her and fell in love with her, and after much difficulty persuaded her at last to consent to his desires. When in his impatience and consuming passion, he kept daily urging her, she said to him at last, "I am very dear to my father, who watches over me so carefully that neither can I come to you or you to me, unless it be on the night of the Friday before your Easter." For then the Jews are said to labor under a bloody flux, with which they are so much occupied, that they can scarcely pay attention to anything else at that time.⁸⁸

This sermon comes from Caesarius's *Dialogus Miraculorum*, a book of sermons intended for widespread consumption. Thus, parishioners throughout Europe would have heard this tale of male menstruation on Good Friday. The comedy and sexuality of this story, although intended to reinforce Christian theology, probably would have made this sermon quite popular.

Caesarius was not the only one to write that Jewish males bled annually on Good Friday, the anniversary of Jesus' crucifixion and betrayal by the Jews. However, his accusation of male menstruation is unique, for it was intended for the masses. Within the following sixty years, three more Churchmen described, for the benefit of the literate, yearly bleeding as vengeance for betraying Christ: Hugh of St. Cher in 1241, Thomas of Cantimpré in 1263, and Joannes Balbus

⁸⁷ Gavin Langmuir, "Thomas of Monmouth: Detector of Ritual Murder," 827.

⁸⁸ Caesarius of Heisterbach, *The Dialogue on Miracles (Dialogus Miraculorum)* H von E Scott and C C Swinton Bland, trans. vol. 1 (London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1929), 102.

in 1298.⁸⁹ Notes Hugh of St. Cher: “And he struck his enemies in their posteriors...It was a perpetual disgrace because the sickness was a most vile sort. And *certain people say* that the Jews endure this disgrace because they suffer a flux of blood in vengeance of the Lord’s passion, and therefore they are pale.”⁹⁰ Thomas of Cantimpré adds:

...(T)he very impious Jews cried out: ‘His blood is upon us and on our children’ (Matt 27:25). Concerning which the very blessed Augustine said in a certain sermon, which begins “In cruce...,” seems to intimate that from the curse of their parents, a vein of crime still runs in their children through a blemish of their blood, in order that through this inconvenient flow, the impious descendant is implacably tortured, until he repents, he realizes he is guilty of [shedding] Christ’s blood and is healed.⁹¹

This text may not even refer to bloody purgation, but it still claims that Jews were punished for the deicide through their blood. Joannes Balbus gives a similar commentary to that of Hugh of St. Cher, recalling that, “For God struck the Jews in their posteriors and gave them perpetual disgrace, for every year on the crucifixion of the Lord (Good Friday) they discharge blood from their posteriors.”⁹² Each accusation above clearly links the Jewish betrayal of Jesus and its subsequent, bloody punishment.

⁸⁹ Johnson 282.

⁹⁰ Et percussit inimicos suos in posteriora...Opprobrium sempiternum fuit, quia vilissima fuit huiusmodi infirmitas. Et dicunt quidam quod hoc opprobrium sustinent Judaei, quia in vindictam Dominicae Passionis patiuntur fluxum sanguinis, et ideo sunt ita pallidi. *Hugonis de Sancto Charo Opera Omnia*, 8 vols. (Venice, 1754), vol. 2, 207v quoted in *ibid.* 281. My translation. My emphasis.

⁹¹ ...Judaei impissimi clamauerunt: Sanguis [sic] eius super nos, et super filios nostros. Super quo beatissimus Augustinus in sermone quodam, qui incipit: In cruce...innuere videtur quod ex maledictione parentum currat adhuc in filios vena facinoris, per maculam sanguinis: Vt per hanc importune fluidam proles impia inexpiabiliter crucietur, quousque se ream sanguinis Christi recognoscat poenitens, et sanetur.” Thomas of Cantimpré, *Miraculorum et exemplorum memorabilium sui temporis libri duo* (Douai, 1605), 305 quoted in Johnson 288. My translation.

⁹² Percussit enim deus iudeos in posteriora et opprobrium sempiternum dedit illis, nam singulis annis in crucifixione domini emittunt sanuinem per posteriora... Joannes Balbus, *Catholicon* (Mainz, 1460) quoted in Johnson 291. My translation.

By the turn of the fourteenth century, bloody purgation became a monthly affair. The Dominican prior Rudolph of Schlettstadt was the first to suggest Jewish males menstruated monthly: “*I heard from Jews* that certain Jews, that is, all Jews, who come from the descendants of those who, of course, in the passion of Christ cried out, ‘His blood be upon us and our children!’ flow every month with blood.”⁹³ *Sanguis eius super nos et super filios nostros* assigns a spiritual impurity to Jews. As this chapter will demonstrate, Jews and Christians understood impurity in nuanced ways.

4.2 THE DISCOURSE OF PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL IMPURITY

The historiographical evolution of the bloody flux punishment also took into account revivals of humoral medicine due to increased contact with Arabic culture. As Willis Johnson notes, religious “rationalization and medicalization”⁹⁴ occurred at a new crossroads of physical conceptions of bloodshed and their theological implications. Here, I will examine the intersection of physical and religious bloody purgation according to Jewish and Christian perspective. In doing so, I reveal a subtle yet crucial difference between Jewish and Christian understandings of menstrual impurities. Specifically, I argue that both Jews and Christians were concerned with the physical and spiritual impurity of menstruation, but that each placed their emphasis on a different aspect of uncleanness: Jews emphasized physical purity, especially in

⁹³ *Audivi a Judeis, quod quidam Judeorum, scilicet qui in passione Cristi clamaverunt coram Pilato: ‘sanguis eius super nos et filios nostros’, quod omnes Judei, qui de eorum genere processerunt, singulis mensibus sanguine fluunt...* Rudolf von Schlettstadt, *Historiae Memorabiles*. E. Kleinschmidt, ed. (Cologne, 1974), 65 quoted in Johnson 290. My translation. My emphasis.

⁹⁴ Johnson 275.

terms of food preparation and human contact, while Christians believed the uncleanness of menstruation came about through the spiritual impurity of Eve's sin. Christians applied this framework of spiritually impurity as a result of a sin to those who committed, in their mind, the greatest sin of all—deicide.

According to humoral medicine, the temperament of a Jewish male was more closely aligned with that of a woman than that of a Christian male. Christian males were blessed with choleric constitutions, with hot and dry qualities; their heat facilitated “perfect” digestion.⁹⁵ Women were naturally phlegmatic, or cool and wet. Their cold natures gave them coarse blood that was not properly digested. To remain healthy, women required regular purgation of this blood through menstruation.⁹⁶ The notion of healthy purging became common in the Middle Ages with the arrival of Islamic medicine. For instance, in *Medical Aphorisms*, Maimonides maintains that the purgation of blood aids the organs in the healthy decomposition of organic matter.⁹⁷ Meanwhile, Jews were thought to have melancholic, or cold and dry humors.⁹⁸ Presumably, the same coldness that governed female complexions also necessitated Jewish purgation. It is important to note that there is variation in bloody punishments mentioned above. Some men menstruate while others experience hemorrhoids. In fact, physicians in antiquity and the High Middle Ages equated the two because both came about through a superfluity of humors,

⁹⁵ Irven Resnick, “Medieval Roots of the Myth of the Jewish Male Menses.” *Harvard Theological Review* 93 no. 3 (July 2000): 256; David Katz, “Shylock’s Gender: Jewish Male Menstruation in Early Modern England.” *The Review of English Studies*, vol. 50 no. 200 (Nov., 1999): 445.

⁹⁶ Resnick 256; Katz 445.

⁹⁷ Fred Rosner, *The Medical Legacy of Moses Maimonides* (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1998), 99.

⁹⁸ Resnick 253-255, 257.

particularly cold, wet ones.⁹⁹ However, the shedding of excess humors was only one medieval explanation for menstruation.

Christian theologians also believed menstruation came about through religious punishment. Jewish males were cursed for denying Jesus just as women were cursed for Eve's sin. According to Hildegard of Bingen, if Eve had not been expelled from Eden, her constitution would have remained healthy and she would not have menstruated.¹⁰⁰

Because of their supposedly dissolute nature and superfluous bodily fluids, females are considered unclean during their periods in both the Christian and Jewish traditions. In Christianity, just as in Judaism, menstrual blood has deleterious effects; "From contact of which blood crops do not sprout, new wine sours, plants die, trees lose their fruit..."¹⁰¹ In both religions, this curse *can* sometimes prevent participation in a holy community, although there is some variation. The Eastern Orthodox Church still discourages women from partaking in the Eucharist during their menstrual periods. Indeed, there is a perverse irony in consuming Christ's redemptive bloodshed while experiencing an impure bloodshed that serves as a reminder of Eve's sin. However, when Augustine of Canterbury asks whether a woman may enter a Church or take communion during her menstrual period, Gregory the Great responds, declaring that a (Roman Catholic) woman may do both because her monthly "illness" is beyond her control; although she is defiled from Eve's sin, she has no intent to do evil. Although Gregory goes on to praise she who chooses to refrain from communion, he does so because she errs on the side of

⁹⁹ Johnson 288.

¹⁰⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et Curae* Paul Kaiser, ed. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903) 3, 103 quoted in Resnick 245 n13.

¹⁰¹ Cujus cruroris contactu fruges non germinant, acescunt musta, moriuntur herbae, amittunt arbores foetus. Rabanus Maurus, *De universo* 6.1 (PL 111: 174B) quoted in Resnick 245. My translation.

caution.¹⁰² Despite Gregory's positive answer, Augustine's question demonstrates that the integration of menstruating women into a holy community was still a concern.

Within each religion, however, there are subtle differences in standards of purity. The length of time during which the woman is unclean separates Christian from Jewish practice. Though Christian women are unclean during their periods, the very act of purging excessive humors makes her clean again. Meanwhile, the Old Testament and the Talmud abound with rules and regulations regarding a woman's monthly discharge. Jewish women are held to more stringent guidelines of purity than Christian women are. A woman is not only unclean during her period, but for approximately seven days after her period ends; this clearly contrasts with the Christian tradition, in which impurity ends with the culmination of the menstrual period. The seven "clean" days, as well as a ritual immersion in a *mikveh*, restores the Jewish woman to a state of purity. Anything she touches during her impurity is considered unclean. For this reason, a woman may not have sexual intercourse with her husband during this time.¹⁰³ In some cases, she will separate herself from her larger community. This ritual separation is called *niddah*, also the title of the Talmud tractate in which the Rabbis argued the particulars of separation and family purity.¹⁰⁴

It is not sufficient to merely label the menstruating woman "unclean." The particulars of uncleanliness separate the Jewish discourse of menstruation from the Christian. While both Judaism and Christianity are concerned with the physical and spiritual impurity of menstruation,

¹⁰² Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. David Hugh Farmer, Leo Sherley-Price, Ronald Edward Latham, ed. (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc, 1990), 84-86.

¹⁰³ Genesis 31:35, Leviticus 15:19-29, 18:19.

¹⁰⁴ *Niddah* still exists in its entirety in the Babylonian Talmud; only a fragment of the tractate remains in the Jerusalem Talmud. Jacob Neusner, trans. *The Talmud of Babylonia: An American Translation: XXXVI: Tractate Niddah*, vol. 1-2 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990).

each place their emphasis on a different type of uncleanness. In Christianity, there is a strong emphasis on Eve's sin and the spiritual impurity it imparts upon menstruating women. In Judaism there is more of an emphasis on physical impurity. Menstruating women are impure because the place from which their blood flows, the womb, is considered unclean. The blood's origin necessitates a ritual separation from her husband, lest she pass her physical impurity to him. Additionally, tractate Niddah seems to emphasize the physical impurity of menstruation as it spends a great deal of time talking about menstruating women and food preparation.¹⁰⁵ Yet, the Jewish woman's physical impurity also imparts a spiritual impurity; for this reason, ancient women were not permitted in the Temple precincts and a sacrifice was required for their reentry into the religious community.¹⁰⁶ Even today, Ethiopian Jews from the Beta Israel tribe recognize the woman's spiritual impurity by relegating menstruating women to a clearly delineated "impure" space, in contrast the communal space.¹⁰⁷ Likewise, Christian women demonstrate a concern for physical and spiritual impurity, but are distinct from Jews in that their physical impurity is rooted in the spiritual impurity of Eve's sin. Although Christian women were also excluded from the religious community (namely, sometimes discouraged from taking the Eucharist) during their menstrual periods, the spiritual impurity attached to Eve's sin is the root of their impurity. For Jews, exclusion from the spiritual community was the next logical step from their physical uncleanness.

¹⁰⁵ Neusner.

¹⁰⁶ Leviticus required a sacrifice for women to re-enter the Temple after their separation from the rest of the community: "On the eighth day, she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons and bring them to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting. The priest shall offer one for a sin offering and one for a burnt offering; and the priest shall make atonement on her behalf before the Lord for her unclean discharge" (Leviticus 15:29-30).

¹⁰⁷ Lisa Anteby, "'There's Blood in the House': Negotiating Female Rituals of Purity among Ethiopian Jews in Israel." *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*. Rahel Wasserfall, ed. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997), 166-184.

4.3 A RETURN TO MALE MENSTRUATION: A MISAPPLIED FRAMEWORK FOR IMPURITIES AND THE PROXIMITY THAT MADE IT POSSIBLE

Imagine that you are a medieval Christian. You must go to the house of your Jewish neighbor, seeking a loan. Once there, you notice that your banker's wife is conspicuously absent, even though your wife saw her at the market a few days ago. You assume she must have her menstrual period, because you know enough about Jewish practices to realize that she has ritually separated herself from the community, just as your wife tries to avoid communion during hers. In your small town, you have grown accustomed to seeing Jewish women obeying their family purity laws.

Due to the inevitable interactions between Jews and Christians in medieval communities, Christians had the opportunity to observe their Jewish neighbors practicing purity rituals during and after menstruation. Therefore, they likely possessed an understanding of *Niddah* at its most basic level: that Jewish women avoided their husbands and sometimes the community because their menstrual periods made them unclean. This rough grasp of *Niddah* was not enough to overcome the subtle distinctions between Jewish and Christian spiritual and physical impurity in the discourse of menstruation. Christians applied their own framework, one that viewed menstrual impurity as stemming from Eve's sin, in an attempt to understand their Jewish neighbors. They undoubtedly believed this attribution was acceptable because they recognized a Jewish and Christian shared concern for menstrual impurity.

Furthermore, Christians read their exegetical concern for Eve's curse (as well as the sins of Judas and Arius) onto the Jews, and assigned them a logical punishment in which the disgrace they incurred from the deicide was made manifest. In the Christian mind, Jews were accursed for an event that occurred more recently than Eve's long-ago sin. Jews were, after all,

responsible for the deicide and had to be punished accordingly. In the tradition of Judas, Arius, and Sheriff John, bloody purgation was a most fitting punishment for another set of Jesus' betrayers—the Jews. Christians combined their belief in the Jewish complicity in the deicide with a framework for understanding the impurity implicit in bloody purgation to craft a creative and dangerous myth. Here, Christians imputed to Jews a spiritual impurity. However, it was not a spiritual impurity that came about by physical impurity—that is to say, a Jewish framework for understanding impurities. Instead, they assigned Jews their own framework of uncleanness, in which a weighty sin rendered the evildoer first spiritually and then, subsequently, physically impure. In reading their own framework of impurity onto Jews, Christian unknowingly made evident the point of divergence in a seemingly shared understanding of menstruation.

5.0 CIRCUMCISION AND RITUAL CANNIBALISM: COVENANTS IN BLOOD AND RITUALS IN WINE AFTER THE FOURTH LATERAN COUNCIL

Over time, the accusations that Jews required Christian blood became progressively more fanciful. Jews not only shed Christian blood; they also consumed it for a variety of medicinal and ritual purposes. Because the narrative of Jewish blood consumption arose soon after Christians began to “officially” ingest the flesh and blood of Christ during the Eucharist (namely, after the Fourth Lateran Council declared transubstantiation to be doctrine), it will be useful to analyze the ritual cannibalism accusation in terms of the recently dogmatized Eucharist.

This section’s discussion of ritual cannibalism, as well as the following section’s analysis of Host desecration, owes much to the work of previous scholars, particularly Gavin Langmuir and David Biale. I will employ their theories to demonstrate that ritual cannibalism and Host desecration (see chapter 6) came about through a heightened Christian concern for all things Eucharistic, especially in light of the newly affirmed doctrine of transubstantiation. Because the taking of communion symbolizes in part Jesus’ sacrifice for the redemption of mankind, I will analyze corresponding Jewish typologies for redemption that feature bloodshed and are remembered by the consumption of wine. Joining my theory of Eucharistic concern, gleaned from Langmuir and Biale, with primary sources that describe the typology of redemptive covenants, I will demonstrate that Christians attributed their own concern for the blood in the Eucharistic wine to the occasional Jewish symbolic use of wine to signify blood in rituals

commemorating redemption, to believe that Passover wine required Christian blood. As an addendum, I will address an odd Jewish practice in the circumcision ritual and how a Christian interpretation of it could have further strengthened the idea that Jews consumed Christian blood.

5.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

On Christmas Day 1235 in the Hessian town of Fulda, five sons of a miller were found dead. Two nearby annalists at Erfurt and Marbach recorded the accusation, stating that the local Jews appropriated the blood of the dead boys. Although he blamed the Crusaders for the murder, the Erfurt annalist reported that two Jews confessed to murdering the boys, extracting their blood, and storing the blood in bags. The Marbach annalist claimed that the Jews made off with the blood *ad suum remedium*. Langmuir explains that this ambiguous Latin term may refer to either religious or medical need.¹⁰⁸ Regardless of the blood's intended purpose, thirty-four Jews were executed in punishment three days later. By 1235, Jews did not merely require Christian bloodshed for religious purposes; they also required the Christian blood that was shed.

Soon, accusations of ritual cannibalism stressed that Jews required Christian blood on Passover. For instance, in 1240, a letter written by Jacob ben Elie detailed an accusation made against his people: "This apostate (Nicholas Donin) went before the kings superior to all kings and spoke lies and made false accusations that on Passover nights we slaughter young boys still accustomed to their mothers' breasts and that the Jews had adopted this custom and that the

¹⁰⁸ *Annales Ephordenses* in *MGH SS* 16:31 and *Annales Marbacenses* in *MGH SS* 17:178 in Gavin Langmuir, *Toward A Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 264.

hands of merciful women cook the children and we eat their flesh and drink their blood.”¹⁰⁹ In 1247, Pope Innocent IV addressed the claim that Jews partook in the heart of a Christian victim at Passover, declaring the blood accusation to be false.¹¹⁰ By the fourteenth century, Jews supposedly used Christian blood to make the Passover wine and *afikomen*.

The proliferation of ritual cannibalism accusations from the mid-thirteenth century onwards may be a reaction to the doctrine of transubstantiation, affirmed in 1215’s Fourth Lateran Council. According to Canon 1, “In which there is the same priest and sacrifice, Jesus Christ; whose body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar in the form of bread and wine; with the bread changed into the body and the wine changed into the blood by divine power, so that for the purpose of effecting the mystery of unity, we may receive of Him what He has received from us.”¹¹¹ Although transubstantiation in the Church preexisted the Fourth Lateran Council (Hildebert de Lavardin, the Archbishop of Tours, is believed to have been the first to use the word “transubstantiation” in the late eleventh century), such an idea probably never achieved widespread promulgation throughout Christendom until the Fourth Lateran Council and its dissemination throughout Europe.

Scholars such as Gavin Langmuir and David Biale have suggested that there is a connection between the Church’s confirmation of Christ’s real presence in the Eucharistic wine and wafer and the ritual cannibalism accusations that followed soon after.

¹⁰⁹ Letter of Jacob ben Elie in Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary in America, 1989), 339 in David Biale, *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol Between Jews and Christians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 115.

¹¹⁰ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1910 edition, 393-394.

¹¹¹ In qua idem ipse sacerdos, et sacrificium Jesus Christus; cujus corpus et sanguinis in sacramento altaris sub speciebus panis et vini veraciter continentur; transsubstantiatis pane in corpus et vino et sanguinem, potestate divina, ut ad perficiendum mysterium unitatis accipiamus ipsi de suo quod accepit ipse de nostro. My translation. Schroeder 560.

5.1.1 The Christian Response to 1215

Several scholars have suggested that the Christian reaction to the Eucharist's dogmatization contributed to the proliferation of blood myths, albeit in different ways.

Langmuir suggested that the Host desecration accusation was a coping mechanism for theological doubters among the Christian masses. When Christians doubted the recently dogmatized doctrine of transubstantiation, they sought to affirm this doctrine with narratives of Jewish cannibalism and Host desecration.¹¹² The multitude of miracle stories that accompany such accusations may validate the Christian desire to confirm the veracity of transubstantiation. As Miri Rubin points out, miracle narratives helped to eradicate any Eucharistic doubt.¹¹³

Biale takes issue with Langmuir's theory, stating that such doubts did not exist among the masses, from which these blood accusations emerged. Instead, the Host desecration narrative was a way for Christians to connect with a religious discourse normally confined to the ecclesiastical ivory tower. While Biale agrees that there was a Christian desire to tell host miracle stories, he suggests they stemmed from "a deep desire to make this mystical sacrament real and visible"¹¹⁴ among the people, a popular response to theological musings of churchmen. As Miri Rubin notes, the Christian masses were able to connect with and strengthen their Christian identities in telling and hearing such stories.¹¹⁵ Blood accusations therefore came about "as a negative by-product of the very increase in Eucharistic piety."¹¹⁶

¹¹² Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism*, 13, 120-121, 270-271, 307.

¹¹³ Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 144.

¹¹⁴ Biale 112.

¹¹⁵ Rubin 5.

¹¹⁶ Biale 112.

Langmuir and Biale's readings are each valuable, yet neither need to be correct for the purposes of this and the following section. Rather, the abundance of Host desecration narratives cited as evidence by both scholars supports my assertion that after 1215, the doctrine of transubstantiation was at the forefront of Christian consciousness. How did this affect the Christian perception of their neighbors?

5.2 REDEMPTIVE BLOOD COVENANTS AND THEIR COMMEMORATIONS WITH WINE

5.2.1 Jewish and Christian Covenants

In Judaism, circumcision is a mark that distinguishes Jews from other nations and is a tangible representation of God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants.¹¹⁷ In his covenant with Abraham, God promises the future redemption of Abraham's descendents, the Jewish people. This redemption will ultimately come about through the Jewish exodus from Egypt, receiving of the Torah, and arrival in the land of Israel. In introducing the covenant, God says to Abram¹¹⁸:

Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great

¹¹⁷ Genesis 17, Leviticus 12:3.

¹¹⁸ Abraham was born with the Sumerian name Abram. Upon making the covenant with God, his name was changed to Abraham, which means "father of many." Thus, Abraham was the father of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim nations.

possessions¹¹⁹ ...To your descendants, I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates...”¹²⁰

God also blesses the Jewish people: “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”¹²¹ God reiterates these promises in making the covenant with Abraham, saying,

I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you.... And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God.... This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.¹²²

Meanwhile, circumcision is not a prerequisite for blessing or redeeming Christians. Paul’s letters establish early in Christian history that circumcision is unnecessary; Jesus had already shed his blood to redeem humanity, rendering circumcision obsolete:

*For freedom in Christ has set us free.... Listen! I, Paul, am telling you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you. Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire law.... For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love.*¹²³

“For freedom in Christ has set us free” probably refers to Jesus’ substitutionary atonement, as the first epistle of Peter mentions: “For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the

¹¹⁹ It is likely that God intends the Law, or the Torah, to be among these “great possessions.”

¹²⁰ Genesis 15:13-14, 18; “this land” is called Canaan in Genesis 17:8.

¹²¹ Genesis 12:2-3.

¹²² Genesis 17:6-8, 10-11.

¹²³ My emphasis. Galatians 5:1-6.

unrighteous, in order to bring you to God.”¹²⁴ This return to God also stresses faith and love in Jesus. As faith and love supplant circumcision, Paul explains that one must be circumcised of the heart: “For a person who is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and *real circumcision is a matter of the heart—it is spiritual and not literal*. Such a person receives praise not from others but from God.”¹²⁵ By putting one’s faith in Jesus and obeying his laws, the believer makes his own covenant with God, one made possible when Jesus shed his blood to redeem the world. In a similar manner, the Jews received their freedom, the Torah, and a homeland after Abraham began the tradition of circumcision. Jews and Christians each have a covenant in blood with God; what circumcision means for Judaism, Jesus’ sacrifice means for Christianity.

5.2.2 Commemorations of Blood Covenants with Rituals of Wine

Through rituals, both Jews and Christians ensured the continued observation of their respective covenants. Christians achieved this by partaking in the Holy Communion. The Eucharist is a tangible reminder of the covenant of redemption promised to believers upon Jesus’ crucifixion. The Eucharistic wine becomes the blood of Christ and Christians are reminded of Jesus’ sacrifice and saving grace. Thus, medieval Christians believed they were drinking Jesus’ blood, while recalling his sacrifice and giving thanks for their redemption.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ 1 Peter 3:18.

¹²⁵ My emphasis. Romans 2:28-29.

¹²⁶ It is important to note that at this time, in larger, urban cathedrals, “communion in one kind”—the exclusive use of bread in transubstantiation—was frequently employed. However, wine would continue to be used in smaller town and village churches where accusations

Jews recalled their covenant and the redemption it promised in both the circumcision ritual and the Passover *seder*. Wine is used in the *brit milah*, or ceremony of circumcision that occurs on the Jewish male's eighth day of life. However, there is no blood symbolism attached to the wine; it is merely an aspect of religious celebration. Yet the covenant that the *brit milah* celebrates comes to fruition in the holiday of Passover. The covenant states that Jews would be freed from slavery, receive the Torah ("they shall be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgment on the nation they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions"), and arrive in their homeland, *eretz yisrael* ("To your descendents, I give this land...").¹²⁷ Every year, Jews must recall the enslavement and redemption of their ancestors during Passover.

Wine is crucial part of the *seder* ritual and is used multiple times throughout the service to symbolize blood. When Ashkenazi *seder* participants pour drops of wine onto their saucer they recall the blood shed by the Egyptians in the name of Jewish liberation. Altogether, 16 drops of wine are spilled: three for the ways in which God delivered the Israelites from Egypt (indeed, the "blood and fire and columns of smoke"¹²⁸ hurt the Egyptians), ten for the plagues leveled against the Egyptians, and three for a three-worded mnemonic for the plagues, suggested by Rabbi Judah.¹²⁹ These drops are spilled from a full cup of wine. A full cup is a symbol of joy, so the wine spilled expresses the sadness that Egyptian blood was spilt. Additionally, *charoses*,

frequently sprung up (e.g. Fulda). Additionally, those who took "communion in one kind" still would have been aware of wine's role in the Eucharist, given the oft-cited line, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me...This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (I Corinthians 11:24-25).

¹²⁷ Genesis 15:13-14, 18.

¹²⁸ Joel 3:3.

¹²⁹ David Goldstein, ed and trans. *The Ashkenazi Haggadah* (New York: Harry N. Abrahams, Inc, 1985), 25.

or the edible representation of the mortar with which the enslaved Israelites built Egyptian structures, is also closely related to the discourse of wine and blood. Several *midrashim* describe the blood of the enslaved Israelites mixing with mortar. For instance, the aggadic-midrashic commentary *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* tells a tragic story: “Rachel...was pregnant, and was trampling the mortar with her husband, and she gave birth prematurely so that the foetus became mixed within the bricks [she was trampling].”¹³⁰ *Charoses* is almost always made with wine and must be soft to “commemorate the blood.”¹³¹ The *midrash* of Rabbi Eliezer goes on to describe Rachel’s anguish and its consequences: “And her cry ascended to the Throne of Glory...That night the Holy One blessed be He appeared and smote all the Egyptian firstborn.”¹³² Although the wine in the *charoses* is used to represent Jewish blood, this midrash *may* suggest that it could also represent the blood of first-born Egyptians, which permitted the Jewish exodus from Egypt.

5.3 CONCLUSION

With an obsession for blood’s redemptive power through Jesus’ sacrifice and an accompanying, increased concern for the Eucharist, Christians may have understood the Jewish use of wine in commemorative rituals of their redemptive blood-covenants to actually employ Christian blood. Although the transubstantiation only dealt with the blood of Christ, its conflation with earlier ritual murder accusations would have put ritual cannibalism of Christian blood within the realm of possibility. Israel Yuval argues that to the Christian who believed that the sacrament of wine

¹³⁰ Israel Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 252.

¹³¹ Israel Yuval, “Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages: Shared Myths, Common Language,” 102; Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 253.

¹³² Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 252.

was literally the body of Christ, it would not be inconceivable to imagine that certain ritual Passover foods had a strong connection to and/or required blood.¹³³ Yuval's point is valid, but I would like to qualify it and suggest that the heightened contemporary Eucharistic consciousness would have precipitated such beliefs.

Some Jews knew the accusation that was made against them and responded accordingly. After the ritual cannibalism accusation became more prevalent, some Jewish communities began to substitute white wine for red or rosé wine¹³⁴ in the Passover ritual to avoid the latter's symbolic conflation with blood.¹³⁵ Jonathan Elukin suggests that Jews found the accusation that they consumed blood so abhorrent that they used white wine in an effort to dispel any notions of cannibalism.¹³⁶ However, this did not occur until the Late Middle Ages; evidence of this substitution comes from a seventeenth-century gloss of the sixteenth-century *halakhic* text *Shulhan Aruch*, in which it is written: "It is a mitzvah to seek red wine...in memory of the blood, that Pharaoh would slaughter the Israelites. And today, we avoid taking red wine, because of false lies told about us, in our great sins."¹³⁷ Although I am, as of yet, uncertain of where and when this practice was employed, such a phenomenon demonstrates that Jews and Christians possessed at least some mutual awareness of religious practices. Although it is unlikely that many Christians were present at Passover *seders*, it is probable that they were at least familiar with the happenings at their neighbors' ritual gatherings.

¹³³ Israel Yuval, "Jews and Christians," 102; Israel Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 254.

¹³⁴ It is important to note that most medieval Jews probably drank rosé wine, not red wine. Although rosé wine would not appear to look like blood, its pinkish hue could allow Christians to believe that a few drops of Christian blood were used to make this wine.

¹³⁵ Biale 134.

¹³⁶ Jonathan Elukin in a phone conversation with the author, 12 March 2010.

¹³⁷ Quoted in Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 254 n142.

We have demonstrated a Christian application of a Christian framework to a shared typology. However, in certain cases, it is possible that Christians, in fact, misunderstood Jewish practice. In the Eucharist and the Passover *seder*, blood is consumed in a figurative manner through wine. In the circumcision ritual, a controversial practice was sometimes employed that could have easily been misinterpreted for the literal consumption of blood. In *metzizah b'peh*, or “suction by mouth,” the mohel sucks blood from the circumcision wound in order to prevent infection. This practice still exists today, though extraordinarily rare, and only in the most orthodox of circles.¹³⁸

Although it is not clear how widespread this practice was during the Middle Ages, some Christians were aware of it, which perhaps contributed to the accusation of ritual cannibalism against the Jews. For instance, the Dominican theologian Raymond Martini wrote, “And with what great guilt is that most abominable mouth, which quite often has blasphemed the Lord Jesus Christ, infected and punished. For as often as they circumcise an infant or an adult, they suck the penis orally for as long as the blood emerges from it.”¹³⁹

There is no way to gauge the dissemination of the knowledge of *metzizah b'peh* among Christians. However, for the Christian already conflating his Eucharistic obsession with

¹³⁸ The Talmudic precedent for *metzizah b'peh* is found in Mishnah Shabbat 19:2. *Metzizah*, or suction, must occur as part of the circumcision process, but does not necessarily need to be done by mouth. According to the late eighteenth-, early nineteenth-century Rabbi Moses Sofer, a sponge is an acceptable substitute.

The practice of *metzizah b'peh* has been a source of controversy in recent years. In 2005, three New York infants contracted herpes by way of an infected cold sore on a mohel's mouth. One of these infants died from the infection.

¹³⁹ Raymond Martini, *Pugil fidei adversus Mauros et Iudeos*, 3.3.11.18: 786 in Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 150 and Biale 99. This may also be a reiteration of Arator's idea of sinning through the mouth. In *De Actibus Apostolorum*, the mouths of Judas and Arius sinned by betraying Jesus (4.1). In Martini's understanding, the Jews used the same mouth with which they blasphemed Jesus to suck blood.

previous ritual murder accusations, an awareness of *metzizah b'peh* would have only served to augment suspicion of Jewish ritual cannibalism.

6.0 THE PASCHAL LAMB SACRIFICE AND HOST DESECRATION: TREATMENTS OF THE COMMUNION WAFER AND THE *AFIKOMEN*

We have just examined the blood symbolism of one critical element of the Passover *seder* and the Eucharist, the wine. Here, we shall turn to the blood symbolism of their counterparts, the *afikomen* and the communion wafer.

Perhaps the most bizarre medieval blood accusation was that Jews appropriated and profaned the Host that was the mystical body of Christ. In host desecration stories, the guilty party (often Jewish) comes to possess a Host wafer from his Christian neighbors (often through clever manipulation). They then abuse the wafer, most often through stabbing and/or immersion in boiling water. Because the Host wafer was intended to be transubstantiated into the real presence of Christ, the Jew and his comrades effectively reenact the deicide in the course of harming the Host. Several accusations emphasize the parallel between Jesus and Host, noting that the same instruments of Christ's Passion are employed in desecrating the Host.¹⁴⁰ This occurs in the famous accusation from 1290 Paris, in which a Jew uses instruments similar to those of Christ's Passion: he strikes the wafer with a hammer, pierces it with a nail, and affixes it

¹⁴⁰ Rubin 41.

to a lance. Following the Host's abuse, when the Host bleeds and/or a Christ child or Virgin Mary appears, Christ's real presence in the Host is confirmed.¹⁴¹

The following discussion of Host desecration will also use my reading of Gavin Langmuir and David Biale to interpret a hypothesis proposed by Israel Yuval. In this section, I will synthesize and reimagine their theories to provide a possible explanation for Host desecration based upon interacting neighbors and intersecting typologies. This exploration of the Host and the *afikomen* benefits most from a historiographical evaluation of previous scholarship, rather than primary sources, because the existing corpus of contemporary scholarship on the subject is so fascinating and ripe for examination. I utilize the Christian Eucharistic perspective to expound upon Yuval's contention that the *afikomen* and the Host belonged to the same typological group. This section shows how, in certain cases, Christians may have used their obsession with the Eucharist to interpret Jewish behavior towards the *afikomen* as a mistreatment of the *afikomen's* typological sister, the Host.

6.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The very first Host desecration accusation was made in 1243 Belitz, Germany. Little information remains of the accusation, except that a number of Jews were burnt at the stake in the aftermath. The Host desecration accusation circulated predominantly in Central Europe, with

¹⁴¹ Many Host desecration miracle stories feature eyewitness accounts of a bleeding Host. Today, it is understood to be the bacteria *micrococcus prodigiosus*, or *serratia marcescens*, which causes a red growth on dry, stale food. Cecil Roth, "Host Desecration," Encyclopedia Judaica vol. 8 (Jerusalem: Keter House Publishing Ltd., 1971): 1040-1044; Israel Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 255.

a few exceptions: accusations arose in thirteenth-century Paris and Santarém, Portugal; there were a handful of other accusations in Iberia during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The dearth of cases in Italy is partially due to the papal protection offered to the Jews.¹⁴² However, a Host desecration discourse did exist in Italy, as evidenced by several Italian iconographical depictions of accusations and miracles that occurred elsewhere.¹⁴³ The expulsion of Jews from England in 1290 may account for lack of English accusations.¹⁴⁴

These Host desecration accusations are often accompanied by miracle stories, affirming Christ's real presence in the Host. Host miracle narratives were passed on through word of mouth, plays, texts, and artistic representations. The 1290 Paris accusation, mentioned above, was immortalized in all such media.¹⁴⁵ Here, it was said that the Host began to bleed as if it were Christ. The Jew tossed the Host into the boiling water, which became red, while the Host metamorphosed into a crucifix, floating out of the cauldron.¹⁴⁶ The early fourteenth century host miracle at Korneuberg was depicted in an altarpiece, circa 1470. At Korneuberg, the bleeding Host was wrapped in a cloth, and the bloodstained cloth was venerated.¹⁴⁷ This fifteenth-century German broadsheet, below, depicts a Host desecration allegation and subsequent miracle that occurred in 1478 Passau, Bavaria. Here, a Christian sells stolen Eucharistic wafers to Jews. In their synagogue, they attempt to reenact the crucifixion; they stab the wafers and blood flows

¹⁴² Roth, "Host Desecration," 1043. For an exploration of protective measures initiated by Popes, see Cecil Roth's introduction to and translation of Cardinal Lorenzo Ganganelli's Report. Cecil Roth, ed. *The Ritual Murder Libel and the Jew, The: The Report by Cardinal Lorenzo Ganganelli (Pope Clement XIV)* (London: The Woburn Press, 1934). Accessed 26 June 2009. <<http://www.jrbooksonline.com/PDFs/Roth%20Ritual%20Murder%20Libel%20JR.pdf>>.

¹⁴³ See Italian Host desecration and miracle images in Rubin 43, 146-147, 156, 172.

¹⁴⁴ Roth, "Host Desecration," 1043.

¹⁴⁵ Rubin 40.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 41.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 59-60.

forth. They also burn the wafers, but the face of a child materializes on the wafer, accompanied by angels and doves. The remaining panels depict the punishment of the perpetrators and the synagogue's transformation into a church.¹⁴⁸

Figure 2: Passau broadsheet depicting Host desecration and miracle, c.1480

Image removed to protect copyright. Image can be found here: Roth, "Host Desecration," 1041-1042.

A few decades before Belitz, the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) declared transubstantiation of the Host to be doctrine. Although Jews had yet to be accused of Host desecration, defilement of the Host was a pertinent concern to those attending the Fourth Lateran Council, as this excerpt from Canon 20 indicates: "We establish that in all churches, the chrism and the Eucharist be kept under faithful guard with keys so that a rash hand may not touch them to any horrible or wicked thing."¹⁴⁹ Now that the consecrated wafer was in fact Christ, the Church feared that he would be defiled and harmed.

6.2 SYMBOLS OF THE PASCHAL LAMB SACRIFICE: THE *AFIKOMEN* AND THE HOST

The previous chapter employed the theories of Langmuir and Biale to demonstrate a concern for the Eucharist embedded in the Christian consciousness. I will examine an idea put forth by

¹⁴⁸ Roth, "Host Desecration," 1041-1042.

¹⁴⁹ Statiamus, ut in cunctis ecclesiis chrisma et eucharista sub fideli custodia, clavibus adhibitis, conserventur, ne possit ad illa temeraria manus extendi, ad aliqua horribilia vel nefaria exercenda. My translation. Schroeder 569.

another scholar, Israel Yuval, from this perspective to demonstrate the consequences of reading a typology from a Christian perspective.

The remarkable similarity of the Host and the *afikomen*, or ritually significant piece of *matzah* in the Passover *seder*, denotes traditions and symbols shared by medieval Jews and Christians.¹⁵⁰ Since the destruction of the Second Temple, the *afikomen* has served as a substitute for the *korban pesach*, or paschal lamb sacrifice.¹⁵¹ The *korban pesach* commemorated the blood of the slaughtered lambs that marked the doorposts of the Israelites; the blood indicated to the Angel of Death to “pass over” these homes during the tenth plague. Subsequently, Pharaoh permitted the Jews to leave Egypt. In the Temple period, the *korban pesach* was the last item eaten during the Passover *seder*. After the Second Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, sacrifices were no longer possible. Although the roasted shankbone on the *seder* plate came to symbolize the *korban pesach*, the *afikomen* became the *korban pesach*’s edible replacement. Like the *korban pesach*, nothing may be eaten after the *afikomen* is consumed. As a symbolic representation of the paschal lamb sacrifice, the *afikomen* therefore stands for Israel’s redemption in the form of exodus from Egypt, receiving the Torah, and arrival in the land of Israel. St. Paul of Tarsus assigns Jesus a similar role as the harbinger of redemption when he refers to Jesus as the paschal lamb: “Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been

¹⁵⁰ The *afikomen* and the Host also belong to similar holidays that stress redemption and fall at the same time of year. Most accusations, Host desecration or otherwise, were made around Passover and Easter. Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 59.

¹⁵¹ Mishnah Pesachim 119a.

sacrificed.”¹⁵² As Jesus’ sacrifice was thought to redeem the sins of the world, the *afikomen* and the Host are the (unleavened) breads of redemption.

Strengthening the *afikomen*’s symbolic capacity for redemption, the word *afikomen* may come from the Greek word *aphikomenos* meaning “the One who Comes.”¹⁵³ Elijah the Prophet, who is said to announce the coming of the messiah, is symbolically welcomed at every Passover *seder*. Passover not only celebrates the past redemption of the Jewish people but also looks forward to future redemption: “In Nissan¹⁵⁴ we were redeemed and in Nissan we shall be redeemed again.”¹⁵⁵ In instructing the Corinthians to partake in the Eucharist, Paul also emphasizes the messianic qualities of the Host: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”¹⁵⁶ A more common translation of *afikomen* is “dessert.” Just as dessert is the last item eaten during a meal, so too was the paschal lamb and, later, the *afikomen*. This underscores the connection between “dessert” and the paschal lamb sacrifice, which helped bring about Israel’s redemption.

6.2.1 Jewish Treatments of the *Afikomen*

Due to economic and social integration, certain Christians may have been aware of a Jewish treatment of the *afikomen*, which could have been interpreted to be a desecration of the Host.

In the fourteenth century, German Jews were known to hang the *afikomen* in public spaces. The custom began as neighbors hung the *matzah* in a shared courtyard to circumvent the

¹⁵² 1 Corinthians 5:7.

¹⁵³ Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 246.

¹⁵⁴ The month in which Passover occurs.

¹⁵⁵ Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 246.

¹⁵⁶ 1 Corinthians 11:26.

Jewish prohibition on carrying items from private to public space (and to keep the *matzah* away from mice).¹⁵⁷ Later, the tradition evolved to display the *afikomen* on the synagogue wall, often affixed by nails.¹⁵⁸ Meanwhile, a Church trend developed towards displaying the Host in a windowed monstrance, rather than the closed ciborium. Thus, both Jews and Christians were displaying their paschal lamb symbols in public places.

This display of a paschal sacrificial symbol nailed to the wall could have prompted some Christians to believe that Jews were in fact publicly desecrating the host, or perhaps mocking Christ's crucifixion. Such misinterpretations also demonstrate a concerned Eucharistic reading of a Jewish practice. According to a text by the early fourteenth-century Rabbi Shalom Neustadt, an apostate claimed this nailed, displayed *afikomen* was done in mockery of Christ and his crucifixion on Passover.¹⁵⁹ This Christian misinterpretation of a Jewish practice rooted in shared symbolism did not go unchallenged. Rabbi Neustadt responded to this accusation by displaying the *afikomen* in his home, a private space.¹⁶⁰ In the early sixteenth century, a German Jew confessed under torture to Host desecration by way of hanging a Host on the synagogue wall. When authorities went to investigate this claim, they discovered a piece of *matzah* nailed to the wall.¹⁶¹ A preoccupation with the Host influenced the Christian interpretation of the *afikomen* nailed to the wall and perhaps led Jews to label their own practical religious behavior as Host desecration, albeit under torture.

¹⁵⁷ Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 236.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 237-8.

¹⁵⁹ *Hilkhot u-Minhagei Rabbenu Shalom mi-Neustadt*. S. Spitzer, ed. (Jerusalem, 1977) in *ibid.* 238.

¹⁶⁰ Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 238.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 238.

The hanging of the *afikomen* on the wall seems to be a relatively widespread phenomenon in High to Late Medieval Germany, for Yuval quotes a multitude of sources from the fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries.¹⁶² And indeed, a great deal of accusations took place in Germany. However, the nailed *afikomen* clearly did not contribute to every Host desecration accusation, for the Host desecration accusation almost certainly predated the practice of the nailed *afikomen*. Additionally, since this seems to be a German phenomenon, the nailed *afikomen* may not have helped bring about Host desecration accusations outside of Germany. However, this is less of a concern, for news of a nailed *afikomen* or a German Jew's confession, mentioned above, could have spread abroad by word of mouth. Nevertheless, not every Host desecration accusation came about through the Christian interpretation of the nailed *afikomen*. A Christian preoccupation with the Eucharist could have exclusively been at work in creating certain Host desecration myths. Indeed, Langmuir and/or Biale's theories allow Host desecration to stand on its own without the aid of the *afikomen*/Host typology and its confusion. However, in the cases where the nailed *afikomen* did contribute to the Host desecration accusation, we see compelling evidence that Christians projected their Eucharistic concern onto a shared typology.

6.3 CONCLUSION

David Biale, along with scholars such as Gavin Langmuir, have emphasized the necessity of “an internal Christian dynamic” in the proliferation of blood accusations. However, David Biale

¹⁶² Ibid. 237.

downplays the role of Jewish practice in these myths, conceding that Jewish practice may have had “indirect connections” with blood accusations, but was not instrumental in their propagation.¹⁶³ I argue that both Jewish practice and a Christian motivating force were crucial components in creating blood accusations. In the formulation of certain Host desecration accusations, Christians interpreted Jewish practices, namely those involving the *afikomen*, from a perspective focused on the Host. In fact, due to proximity and integration, Christians were at least superficially aware of Jewish treatment of the *afikomen* on the *seder* table and on communal walls. In rare cases, certain Christians may have been present at *seders*, but were more likely informed as to what happened (see section 5.3). The Christian *Weltanschauung* may have doubted the real presence in the Host, or it may have desired to tangibly connect the real presence through miraculous stories. Regardless, Christ’s redemptive presence in the Eucharistic wafer was at the forefront of Christian consciousness and, in some cases, contributed to the Christian interpretation of a Passover ritual.

In placing the issue of transubstantiation in the contemporary Christian sensibility next to certain Jewish treatments of the *afikomen*, one may see how both misprisions and applications of distinctly Christian concerns came about. The Christian, seeing an *afikomen* hung in his neighbor’s courtyard, might have interpreted this to be a sinister action due to typological similarities between the *afikomen*, the Host, the paschal lamb sacrifice, and Christ. Furthermore, this action may have been of more concern to him given the Fourth Lateran Council, and he may have been inclined to imagine or believe stories of Jews desecrating the communion wafer.

This is certainly not the only instance of a heightened Christian concern playing an active role in interpreting a Jewish practice. In some Jewish communities, it was customary to burn

¹⁶³ Biale 112.

effigies of Haman, the Purim villain, on a cross. Purim, another holiday that celebrates Jewish redemption, sometimes falls close to Easter. In 1933, Cecil Roth suggested the burnt and crucified effigy of Haman could have easily been mistaken for an effigy of Jesus, especially during years when Purim and Easter fell at approximately the same time—at this time of the year, Christians would have been hypersensitive to and/or hyperaware of representations of Christ’s crucifixion. Easter and Purim coincided in 1932, the year before Cecil Roth suggested this theory.¹⁶⁴ Here, Christians applied an active concern of theirs to Jewish practice, helping to perpetuate feelings of discomfort and suspicion among Jewish and Christian neighbors.

However, certain Jews could have intended for this mock crucifixion to be a hostile gesture against Christians. Indeed, Elliot Horowitz argues that there could have been a deliberate anti-Christian character to these Purim rites, despite the attempts of modern historians to demonstrate otherwise.¹⁶⁵ Likewise, in some cases, Jews may have meant to provoke the hostility of their Christian neighbors in overtly displaying their *afikomen* to evoke a crucified Jesus. Although it is extremely difficult to prove, the intentions of Jews who nailed the *afikomen* to the wall and the interpretations of the Christians who observed this practice probably varied quite a bit. Perhaps some Jews used the *afikomen* to express legitimate hostility towards Christians. Perhaps some merely wanted to keep the *afikomen* away from mice. Perhaps some understood the similarities of the *afikomen* and Host, and nailed the *afikomen* to the wall as a harmless joke, or as a polemic against the Host, rather than Christians. Perhaps some did not understand the *afikomen*-Host typology. The truth of Jewish intention and Christian

¹⁶⁴ Cecil Roth, “The Feast of Purim and the Origins of the Blood Accusation.” *Speculum* 8 no. 4 (October 1933): 520-526.

¹⁶⁵ Elliot Horowitz, “The Rite to Be Reckless: On the Perpetration and Interpretation of Purim Violence.” *Poetics Today* 15 no. 1 (Spring 1994): 13, 27.

interpretation is probably a variegated patchwork of every possible permutation of Jewish forethought (or lack thereof) and Christian exegesis (or lack thereof).

7.0 EPILOGUE

Although medieval Jews had been made victims of countless blood myths, they were also responsible for perpetuating their own blood accusation. Specifically, Jews reversed the allegation that was being leveled against them, saying that Pharaoh appropriated Jewish blood for medical purposes. The idea that Pharaoh, at the time of the Israelites' enslavement in Egypt, bathed in the blood of slaughtered Israelites (often children) as a cure for his leprosy dates back to Rashi of Troyes' eleventh-century commentary on Exodus. This accusation was expounded upon in two thirteenth-century texts, the anonymous ethical work *Sefer ha-Yashar* and *Midrash ha-Gadol* from Yemen.¹⁶⁶ The geographic range yet scarcity of these texts may indicate the widespread dissemination of this story, perhaps through oral transmission.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, many *haggadot*, or books detailing the Passover *seder*, began to illustrate this narrative. Interestingly, such iconography only appeared in *haggadot* from Germany and northern Italy. Below is an example from the mid-sixteenth century Mantua *Haggadah*. The scene works from right to left, as Hebrew is read in that direction. At the far right, Israelite babies are taken from their distraught mothers. In the center, the children are slaughtered in a manner reminiscent of a kosher sacrifice or slaughter, in which

¹⁶⁶ David Malkiel, "Infanticide in Passover Iconography." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 56 (1993), 87.

the blade is applied to the throat and the blood is drained into a bowl. At the far left, the bowl of blood is dispensed into Pharaoh's tub.¹⁶⁷

Figure 3: Mantua *Haggadah*, 1560

Image removed to protect copyright. Image can be found here: Malkiel, "Infanticide in Passover Iconography," plate 10b.

David Malkiel argues that these images were a Jewish response to the blood accusations that had been leveled against them for over three hundred years.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, as a part of crafting this response, Jews reappropriated the images that Christians used against them.¹⁶⁹ I would suggest that Jews employed such images, reflecting contemporary Jewish concerns. Specifically, Jews projected their own preoccupation with the ritual slaughter of animals (ritual sacrifice in Temple times and kosher slaughter in the contemporary age) onto like images that had been used to demonstrate that Jews were guilty of the blood accusation. For instance, Jews employed the trope of ritual sacrifice, perhaps to evoke a connection with the paschal lamb sacrifice,¹⁷⁰ and the subsequent redemption from Egypt that followed. Because of Pharaoh's slaughter of first-born children, the Israelites cried out to God, who took action through the agency of Moses. Upon marking their houses with the blood of the paschal lamb sacrifice, the Jews were spared from the Angel of Death and redeemed by the exodus from Egypt, the receiving of the Torah, and the arrival in Israel. The Israelite children and the paschal lamb sacrifice also belong to the same typological group as Jesus, and the slaughtered children are

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. plate 10b.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 98-99.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 85-86.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. 92, 98.

called “lambs,”¹⁷¹ just as Jesus is frequently labeled the *agnus*. Yet furthermore, the baby being slaughtered in the middle of the picture resembles the an image of Anderl von Rinn’s ritual murder by Jews in 1462:¹⁷²

Figure 4: Illustration of the ritual murder of Anderl von Rinn, from his cult-church, unknown date

Image removed to protect copyright. Image can be found here: Halsall, “A Blood Libel Cult,” see URL below.

Here, the blade is applied to Anderl’s neck as his blood drains into a bowl, just as it does in the Mantua *Haggadah* (Fig. 3). It is likely that the illustrator of the Mantua *haggadah* never saw this image of Anderl’s ritual murder. Yet Jews would have known that Christians were appropriating the trope of ritual sacrifice in their ritual murder accusations. Thus, in the *haggadot* depicting infanticide, Jews reappropriated their tropes and images as if to say that Christians were interpreting Jewish tropes incorrectly and were the true guilty party in the blood accusation, for Christians had turned Jewish tropes against the Jews themselves.

Of course, Pharaoh was the literal guilty party, having ordered the slaughter of Israelite babies. Although medieval Jews were far removed from their counterparts in ancient Egypt, they actively used the familiar narrative of Pharaoh as a vehicle for Jewish exegesis, both expressing a Jewish concern for ritual sacrifice and kosher slaughter and responding to the blood allegations made against them. Just as Jews projected their values onto tropes recycled from their Christian neighbors, Christians used similar discourses of blood as a basis for reading their own concerns onto Jews. Thus, the Crusades brought about a Christian preoccupation with the Holy Land and,

¹⁷¹ Ibid. 92.

¹⁷² Paul Halsall, ed. and trans. “A Blood Libel Cult: Anderl von Rinn, d. 1462.” *Medieval Sourcebook*. Accessed 7 April 2009. <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/rinn.html>>.

perhaps, the apocalypse, which was subsequently projected onto Jews. A Christian reading of the punishment of Eve's Sin onto betrayers of Jesus arose from subtly different understandings of physical and spiritual impurity. And finally, a sinister Christian interpretation of the use of wine and the *afikomen* in light of an increased concern for the Host was applied to similar rituals commemorating covenants and the paschal lamb sacrifice.

Jews used Pharaoh as a weapon with which they could defend themselves against and avenge the blood accusation. For the true weapons used in blood myths were not knives or crucifixes or boiling water or hammers and nails, but images, tropes, symbols, discourses, and typologies. In examining the roots of blood accusations made by both Jews and Christians, we must remember that, while these two religions lived side by side, sharing a history and typologies, they were also two distinct cultures. As they interacted with one another, their tropes were subject to the interpretation of the other. Elements of their beliefs and practices became partially begun canvasses prepared for the other to complete. It was not merely the Christians who were responsible for the creation and proliferation of blood accusations; blood myths exist because Jewish conceptions of bloodshed were available for Christians to interpret. Even though words, images, and ideas were crucial components of the blood accusation's arsenal, one must not forget that, just as in the case of lances, swords, and guns, these figurative weapons also led to hatred, fear, and violence.

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